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a *Grace Notes* course

## Old Testament History

by Alfred Edersheim

**History 506**

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*Grace Notes*

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**II\_19 The Thirty-eight Years in the Wilderness - The Sabbath-breaker - The Gainsaying of Korah and of his Associates - Murmuring of the People; The Plague, and how it was stayed - Aakon's Rod budding, blossoming, and bearing Fruit.**

**Numbers 33:19-37; 16, 17; Deuteronomy 1:46 to 11:15**

MORE than thirty-seven years of "wanderings" were now to be passed in "the wilderness of Paran," until a new generation had risen to enter on possession of the Land of Promise. Of that long period scarcely more than one single record is left us in Scripture. As a German writer observes, The host of Israel, being doomed to judgment, ceased to be the subject of sacred history, while the rising generation, in whom the life and hope of Israel vow centered, had, as yet, no history of its own. And so we mark all this period rather by the death of the old than by the life of the new, and the wanderings of Israel by the graves which they left behind, as their carcasses fell in the wilderness.

Still, we may profitably gather together the various notices scattered in Scripture. First, then, we learn that Israel "abode in Kadesh many days," (Deuteronomy 1:46) and that thence their direction was "towards the Red Sea." (Deuteronomy 2:1) Their farthest halting-place from Kadesh seems to have been Ezion-gaber, which, as we know, lay on the so-called Elanitic Gulf of the Red Sea. Thence they returned, at the end of the forty years wanderings, once more to "the wilderness of Zin, which is Kadesh." (Numbers 33:36) The "stations" on their wanderings from Kadesh to Ezion-geber are marked in Numbers 33:18-35. There are just seventeen of them, after leaving Rithmah - a name derived from retem, a broom-bush, and which may therefore signify the valley of the broom-bushes. If we rightly understand it, this was the original place of the encampment of Israel near Kadesh. In point of fact, there is a plain close to 'Ain Gadis or Kadesh which to this day bears the name of Abu Retemet. As for Kadesh itself - or the Holy Place, the place of "sanctifying" - which originally bore the name En-Mishpat, "well of judgment," (Genesis 14:7) we imagine that it derived its peculiar name from the events that there took

place, the additional designation of Barnea - Kadesh Barnea - either marking a former name of the place, or more probably meaning "the land of moving to and fro." <sup>1</sup>

We presume that the encampment in "the broom-valley" was in all probability determined by the existence and promise of vegetation there, which, no doubt, was due to the presence of watercourses. Indeed, an examination of the names of the seventeen stations occupied by Israel during their wanderings shows, that all the encampments were similarly selected in the neighborhood of water and vegetation. Thus we have Rimmon-parez, "the pomegranate breach" - perhaps the place where Korah's rebellion brought such terrible punishment; Libnah, "whiteness," probably from the white poplar trees growing there; Rissah, "dew;" Mount Shapher, "the mount of beauty," or "of goodliness;" Mithcah, "sweetness," in reference to the water; Hashmonah, "fatness," "fruitfulness," where to this day there is a pool full of sweet living water, with abundant vegetation around; Bene-jaakan, or, as in Deuteronomy 10:6, <sup>2</sup> Beeroth Bene-jaakan, "the wells of the children of Jaakan," probably the wells which the Jaakanites had dug on their expulsion by the Edomites from their original homes; (Genesis 36:27; 1 Chronicles 1:42) Jotbathah, "goodness;"

<sup>1</sup> Or "wandering," or "being shaken." Bishop Harold Browne suggests the query whether there may be any allusion to this in Psalms 29:8 "The Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh."

<sup>2</sup> In Deuteronomy 10:6, 7, four of these stations are again mentioned, but in the inverse order from Numbers 33. Evidently in Numbers 33, we have the camps from Kadesh to Ezion-gaber during the thirty-seven years of wandering; while in Deuteronomy 10:6, 7 the reference is to the march from Kadesh to Mount Hor in the fortieth year (after the second stay at Kadesh) on the journey of Israel to take possession of the land. But the apparently strange insertion of verses 6 and 7 in Deuteronomy 10 interrupting a quite different narrative, requires explanation. In vers. 1-5 Moses reminds the people how, in answer to his prayer, God had restored His covenant. Verses 6 and 7 are then inserted to show that not only the covenant, but also the mediatorial office of the high-priesthood had been similarly granted anew. God had not only continued it to Aaron, but, on his death at Mosera, Eleazar had been invested with the office, and under his ministry the tribes had continued their onward march. Instead of explaining all this in detail, Moses simply reminds the children of Israel (vers. 6, 7) of the historical facts of the case, which would speak for themselves.

and Ebronah, probably "fords." The other names are either derived from peculiarities of scenery, or else from special events, as Kehelathah, "assembling;" Makheloth, "assemblies;" Haradah, "place of terror," etc. <sup>3</sup>

The first impression which we derive, alike from the fewness of these stations, and from their situation, is, that the encampments were successively occupied for lengthened periods. More than that, we infer from the peculiar wording of some expressions in the original, that, during these thirty-eight years, the people were scattered up and down, the Tabernacle with the Levites forming, as it were, a kind of central camp and rallying-place. It is also quite certain that, at that period, the district in which the wanderings of Israel lay was capable of supporting such a nomadic population with their flocks and herds. Indeed, the presence of water, if turned to account, would always transform any part of that wilderness into a fruitful garden. In this respect the knowledge of irrigation, which the Israelites had acquired in Egypt, must have been of special use. Lastly, the people were not quite isolated. Not only were they near what we might call the direct highway between the East and Egypt, but they were in contact with other tribes, such as the Bene-jaakan. Deuteronomy 2:26-29 seems to imply that at times it was possible to purchase provisions and water, while Deuteronomy 2:7 shows that Israel had not only "lacked nothing" during "these forty years," but that they had greatly increased in substance and wealth. Such passages as Deuteronomy 8:14, etc.; 29:5; and Nehemiah 9:21 prove in what remarkable manner God had cared for all the wants of His people during that period; and there can be no doubt that in the prophetic imagery of the future, especially by Isaiah, there is frequent retrospect to God's gracious dealings with Israel in the wilderness.

Brief as is the record of these thirty-eight years, it contains a notice of two events, both in rebellion against the Lord. The first gives an account of a man who had openly violated the Divine law by

<sup>3</sup> Many of these stations have been identified - at least, with a great degree of probability. But an account of the various suggestions of modern explorers would lead too much into details.

gathering "sticks upon the Sabbath day." (Numbers 15:32-36) Although the punishment of death had been awarded to such a "presumptuous sin," (Exodus 31:14; 35:2) the offender was, in the first place, "put in ward," partly to own the Lord by specially asking His direction, since only the punishment itself but not its mode had been previously indicated, and partly perhaps to impress all Israel with the solemnity of the matter. Due observance of the Lord's day was, indeed, from every point of view, a question of deepest importance to Israel, and the offender was, by Divine direction, "brought without the camp, and stoned with stones, and he died." We are not told at what particular period of the wanderings of Israel this event had occurred. It is apparently inserted as an instance and illustration, immediately after the warning against "presumptuous sins" (literally, "sins with a hand uplifted," viz., against Jehovah). These sins in open contempt of God's word involved the punishment of being "cut off" from the people of the Lord.

Nor have we any precise date by which to fix the other and far more serious instance of rebellion on the part of Korah and of his associates, (Numbers 16) in which afterwards the people, as a whole, were implicated. (Numbers 16:41-50) There is, however, reason to suppose that it occurred at an early period of "the wanderings" - perhaps, as already suggested, at Rimmon-parez. The leaders of this rebellion were Korah, a Levite -descendant of Izhar, the brother of Amram, (Exodus 6:18) and therefore a near relative of Aaron - and three Reubenites, Dathan, Abiram, and On. But as the latter is not further mentioned, we may suppose that he early withdrew from the conspiracy. These men gained over to their side no fewer than two hundred and fifty princes from among the other tribes, <sup>4</sup> all of them members of the national representative council, <sup>5</sup> and "men of renown," or,

<sup>4</sup> The statement that Zelophehad, a Manassite, had not been "in the company of Korah" (Numbers 27:3), implies that his fellow-conspirators belonged to the various tribes.

<sup>5</sup> The Authorized Version (Numbers 16:2) translates "famous," but the literal rendering is "called to the meeting," evidently members of the national representative council. See Numbers 1:16.

as we should express ilk well-known leading men. Thus the movement assumed very large proportions, and evidenced wide-spread disaffection and dissatisfaction.

The motives of this conspiracy seem plain enough. They were simply jealous and disappointed ambition, though the rebels assumed the language of a higher spirituality. As descended from a brother of Aaron, Korah disliked, and perhaps coveted, what seemed to him the supremacy of Aaron, for which he could see no valid reason. He had also a special grievance of his own. True, he was one of that family of the Kohathites to whom the chief Levitical charge in the sanctuary had been committed; but then the Kohathites numbered four families, (Numbers 3:27) and the leadership of the whole was entrusted not to any of the older branches, but to the youngest, the Uzzielites (Numbers 3:30). Was there not manifest wrong and injustice in this, probably affecting Korah personally? It speaks well for the Levites as a whole, that, notwithstanding all this, Korah was unable to inveigle any of them in his conspiracy. But close to the tents of the Kohathites and of Korah was the encampment of the tribe of Reuben, who held command of the division on the south side of the camp. Possibly - and indeed the narrative of their punishment seems to imply this - the tent of Korah and those of the Reubenitic princes, Dathan, Abiram, and On, were contiguous. And Reuben also had a grievance; for was not Reuben Jacob's first-born, who should therefore have held the leadership among the tribes? It was not difficult to kindle the flame of jealousy in an Eastern breast. What claim or right had Moses, or rather the tribe of Levi whom he represented, to supremacy in Israel? Assuredly this was a grievous wrong and an intolerable usurpation, primarily as it affected Reuben, and secondarily all the other tribes. This explains the ready participation of so many of the princes in the conspiracy, the expostulation of Moses with Korah (16:8-11), and his indignant appeal to God against the implied charges of the Reubenites (ver. 15). Indeed, the conspirators expressly stated these views as follows (ver. 3), "Sufficient for you!" - that is, You, Moses and Aaron, have long enough held the priesthood and the government; "for the whole congregation, all are holy, and in the midst

of them Jehovah. And why exalt ye yourselves over the convocation <sup>6</sup> of Jehovah?" It will be observed that the pretense which they put forward to cover their selfish, ambitious motives was that of a higher spirituality, which recognized none other than the spiritual priesthood of all Israel. But, as we shall presently show, their claim to it was not founded on the typical mediatorship of the high-priest, but on their standing as Israel after the flesh.

The whole of this history is so sad, the judgment which followed it so terrible - finding no other parallel than that which in the New Testament Church overtook Ananias and Sapphira - and the rebellion itself is so frequently referred to in scripture, that it requires more special consideration. The rebellion of Korah, as it is generally called, from its prime mover, was, of course, an act of direct opposition to the appointment of God. But this was not all. The principle expressed in their gainsaying (ver. 3) ran directly counter to the whole design of the old covenant, and would, if carried out, have entirely subverted its typical character. It was, indeed, quite true that all Israel were holy and priests, yet not in virtue of their birth or national standing, but through the typical priesthood of Aaron, who "brought them nigh" and was their intermediary with God. Again, this priesthood of Aaron, as indeed all similar selections - such as those of the place where, and the seasons when God would be worshipped, of the composition of the incense, or of the sacrifices - although there may have been secondary and subordinate reasons for them, depended in the first place and mainly upon God's appointment.

"Him whom the Lord hath chosen will He cause to come near unto Him" (6:5); "whom the Lord doth choose, he shall be holy" (ver. 7).

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<sup>6</sup> We have rendered the term literally by "convocation." Two different terms are used in this chapter. One of these - edah - means, literally, congregation, and may be said to designate Israel as the outward and visible Church. The other term is kahal, literally "the called," or convocation, and refers to the spiritual character of Israel as called of God. Thus the distinction of an outward and visible and a spiritual Church had its equivalent in the Old Testament. In this chapter the term kahal occurs only in ver. 3, and again in ver. 33.

Every other service, fire, or place than that which God had chosen, would, however well and earnestly intended, be "strange" service, "strange" fire, and a "strange" place. This was essential for the typical bearing of all these arrangements. It was God's appointment, and not the natural fitness of a person or thing which here came into consideration. If otherwise, they would have been natural sequences, not types - constituting a rational rather than a Divine service. It was of the nature of a type that God should appoint the earthly emblem with which He would connect the spiritual reality. The moment Israel deviated in any detail, however small, they not only rebelled against God's appointment, but destroyed the meaning of the whole by substituting the human and natural for the Divine. The types were, so to speak, mirrors of God's own fitting, which exhibited, as already present, future spiritual realities with all their blessings. In Christ all such types have ceased, because the reality to which they pointed has come.

This digression seemed necessary, alike for the proper understanding of the history of Korah and for that of the typical arrangements of the Old Testament. But to return. On the morning following the outbreak of the rebellion, Korah and his two hundred and fifty associates presented themselves, as Moses had proposed, at the door of the Tabernacle. Here "they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon." Indeed, Korah had gained such influence, that he was now able to gather there "all the congregation" as against Moses and Aaron. Almost had the wrath of God, whose glory visibly appeared before all, consumed "this congregation" in a moment, when the intercession of Moses and Aaron once more prevailed. In these words: "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt Thou be wroth with all the congregation?" (as Calvin remarks) Moses made his appeal "to the general grace of creation," praying that, "as God was the Creator and Maker of the world, He would not destroy man whom He had created, but rather have pity on the work of His hands." And so there is a plea for mercy, and an unspeakable privilege even in the fact of being the creatures of such a God!

Leaving the rebels with their censers at the door of the Tabernacle - perhaps panic-struck - Moses next repaired to the tents of Dathan and Abiram, accompanied by the elders, and followed by the congregation.<sup>7</sup> On the previous day the two Reubenites had refused to meet Moses, and sent him a taunting reply, suggesting that he only intended to blind the people.<sup>8</sup>

And now when Dathan and Abiram, with their wives and children, came out and stood at the door of their tents, as it were, to challenge what Moses could do, the people were first solemnly warned away from them. Then a judgment, new and unheard of, was announced, and immediately executed. The earth opened her mouth and swallowed up these rebels and their families, with all that appertained to them, that is, with such as had taken part in their crime. As for Korah, the same fate seems to have overtaken him. But it is an emphatic testimony alike to the truth of God's declaration, that He punisheth not men for the sins of their fathers, (Jeremiah 31:30; Ezekiel 18:19, 20) and to the piety of the Levites, that the sons of Korah did not share in the rebellion of their father, and consequently died not with him. (Numbers 26:11) More than this, not only were Samuel and afterwards Heman descendants of Korah, (1 Samuel 1:1; 1 Chronicles 6:33-38) but among them were some of those "sweet singers of Israel," whose hymns, Divinely inspired, were intended for the Church at all times. And all the Psalms "of the sons of Korah" have this common characteristic, which sounds like an echo of the lesson learned from the solemn judgment upon their house, that their burden is praise of the King Who is enthroned at Jerusalem, and longing after the services of God's sanctuary.<sup>9</sup> But as for "the

<sup>7</sup> From Numbers 16, and the reference in Numbers 26:10, 11, I am led to infer that Korah followed also in the train, perhaps to see what would come of it, leaving the two hundred and fifty princes at the door of the Tabernacle. If Korah's tent was contiguous to those of Dathan and Abiram, we can form a clearer conception of the whole scene.

<sup>8</sup> Literally rendering 16:14: "Wilt thou put out the eyes of these men?"

<sup>9</sup> The following are the eleven Psalms designated as those of the sons of Korah: Psalm 42., 44.-49., 84., 85., 87., and 88. The following are further references to the history of the sons of



two hundred and fifty men that offered incense," "there came out a fire from the Lord and consumed" them, as, on a former occasion, it had destroyed Nadab and Abihu. (Leviticus 10:2) Their censers, which had been "hallowed," by being presented before the Lord, (Numbers 16:37) were converted into plates for covering the altar of burnt offering, that so they might be a continual "memorial unto the children of Israel" of the event and its teaching.

This signal judgment of God upon the rebels had indeed struck the people who witnessed it with sudden awe, but it led not to that repentance (Psalm 4:4) which results from a change of heart. The impression passed away, and "on the morrow" nothing remained but the thought that so many princes of tribes, who had sought to vindicate tribal independence, had been cut off for the sake of Moses! It was in their cause, the people would argue, that these men had died; and the mourning in the tents of the princes, the desolateness which marked what had but yesterday been the habitations of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, would only give poignancy to the feeling that with this event a yoke of bondage had been forever riveted upon the nation. For they recognized not the purpose and meaning of God; this would have implied spiritual discernment; only that, if judgment had proceeded from Jehovah, it had come, if not at the instigation of, yet in order to vindicate Moses and Aaron. In their ingratitude they even forgot that, but for the intercession of these two, the whole congregation would have perished in the gainsaying of Korah. So truly did that generation prove the justice of the Divine sentence that none of their number should enter into the land of Canaan, and so entirely unfit did their conduct (as of old that of Esau) show them for inheriting the promises!

But as for Moses and Aaron, when the congregation was once more gathered against them with this cruel and unjust charge on their lips, "Ye have killed the people of Jehovah," they almost instinctively "faced towards the tent of meeting," as the place whence their help came and

to which their appeal was now made. Nor did they look in vain.

Denser and more closely than before did the cloud cover the tabernacle, and from out of it burst visibly the luminous glory of Jehovah. And as Moses and Aaron entered the court of the tabernacle, "Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, Get you up from among this congregation, and I will consume them as in a moment. And they fell upon their faces." But what was Moses to plead? He knew that "already" was "wrath gone forth from Jehovah," and "the plague" had "begun." What could he now say? In the rebellion at Mount Horeb, (Exodus 32:31) again at Kadesh, (Numbers 14:13, etc.) and but the day before at the gainsaying of Korah, he had exhausted every argument. No similar plea, nor indeed any plea, remained. Then it was, in the hour of deepest need, when every argument that even faith could suggest had been taken away, and Israel was, so to speak, lost, that the all-sufficiency of the Divine provision in its vicarious and mediatorial character appeared. Although as yet only typical, it proved all sufficient.

The incense kindled on the coals taken from the altar of burnt-offering, where the sacrifices had been brought, typified the accepted mediatorial intercession of our great High Priest. And now, when there was absolutely no plea upon earth, this typical pleading of His perfect righteousness and intercession prevailed. Never before or after was the Gospel so preached under the Old Testament <sup>10</sup> as when Aaron, at Moses' direction, took the censer, and, having filled it from the altar, "ran into the midst of the congregation," "and put on incense, and made an atonement for the people" (16:47).

And as he stood with that censer "between the dead and the living," "the plague," which had already swept away not less than 14,700 men,

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<sup>10</sup> The only similar instance was the lifting up of the brazen serpent, which typically represented another part of the work of our Redeemer. Even the prophecies of Isaiah were not clearer than these two sermons by outward deed, as we may call them, rather one declaring the typical meaning of the Aaronic priesthood, and the efficacy of that to which it pointed; the other, the character and the completeness of God's provision for the removal of guilt.

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Korah: 1 Chronicles 9:19; 12:6; 26:1-19; 2 Chronicles 20:19; Nehemiah 11:19.

"was stayed." Thus if Korah's assumption of the priestly functions had caused, the exercise of the typical priesthood now removed, the plague.

But the truth which God now taught the people was not to be exhibited only in judgment. After the storm and the earthquake came the "still, small voice," and the typical import of the Aaronic priesthood was presented under a beautiful symbol. By direction of God, "a rod" for each of the twelve tribes, bearing the respective names of their princes,<sup>11</sup> was laid up in the Most Holy Place, before the Ark of the Covenant.

And on the morrow, when Moses entered the sanctuary, "behold the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds." The symbolical teaching of this was plain. Each of these "rods" was a ruler's staff, the emblem of a tribe and its government. This was the natural position of all these princes of Israel. But theirs as well as Aaron's were rods cut off from the parent-stem, and therefore incapable of putting forth verdure, bearing blossom, or yielding fruit in the sanctuary of God. By nature, then, there was absolutely no difference between Aaron and the other princes; all were equally incapable of the new life of fruitfulness. What distinguished Aaron's rod was the selection of God and the miraculous gift bestowed upon it. And then, typically in the old, but really in the new dispensation, that rod burst at the same time into branches, into blossom, and even into fruit - all these three combined, and all appearing at the same time. And so these princes "took every man his rod," but Aaron's rod was again brought before the Ark of the Covenant, and kept there "for a token."<sup>12</sup> Nor was even the choice of the almond, which blossoms first of trees, without its deep meaning. For the almond, which bursts earliest into flower and fruit, is called in Hebrew "the

waker" (shaked, comp. Jeremiah 1:11,12). Thus, as the "early waker," the Aaronic priesthood, with its buds, blossoms, and fruit, was typical of the better priesthood, when the Sun of Righteousness would rise "with healing in His wings."<sup>13</sup>

## **II\_20 The Second Gathering of Israel in Kadesh - The Sin of Moses and Aaron - Embassy to Edom - Death of Aaron - Retreat of Israel from the borders of Edom - Attack by the Canaanitish King of Arad.**

### **Numbers 20: 21:1-3**

IT was indeed most fitting that, at the end of the thirty-seven years wanderings, Israel should once more gather at Kadesh. There they had been scattered, when the evil report which the spies had brought led to their unbelief and rebellion; and thence had the old generation carried, as it were, its sentence of death back into the wilderness, till during these long and weary years its full terms had been exhausted. And now a new generation was once more at Kadesh. From the very spot where the old was broken off was the fresh start to be made. God is faithful to His purpose; He never breaks off. If the old was interrupted, it had been by man's unbelief and rebellion, not by failure on the part of God; and when He resumed His work, it was exactly where it had been so broken off. And man also must return to where he has departed from God, and to where sentence has been pronounced against him, before he enters on his new journey to the Land of Promise. But what solemn thoughts might not have been expected in this new generation, as they once more stood ready to resume their journeying on the spot where that of their fathers had been arrested. As He had sanctified His Name in Kadesh by judgment, would they now sanctify it by their faith and willing obedience?

Besides Joshua and Caleb, to whom entrance into the land had been specially promised, only three of the old generation still remained. These were Miriam, Moses, and Aaron. And now, just at the commencement of this fresh start, as if the more solemnly to remind them of the past, Miriam, who

<sup>11</sup> According to the more common view, twelve rods were presented, Ephraim and Manasseh being counted only one tribe, that of Joseph. According to others, there were twelve rods, exclusively of that of Levi, which bore the name of Aaron.

<sup>12</sup> Apparently, both the pot of manna and Aaron's rod were lost when the ark returned from the Philistine cities (see 1 Kings 8:9). This loss also was deeply significant - as it were, God's unspoken comment on the state of Israel.

<sup>13</sup> The significance of the Levitical sections, as they follow upon Numbers 17., will be apparent to the attentive reader. But this is not the place to enter further on the subject.



had led the hymn of thanksgiving and triumph on their first entering the desert, (Exodus 15:31) was taken away. Only Moses and Aaron were now left - weary, wayworn pilgrims, to begin a new journey with new pilgrims, who had to learn afresh the dealings of Jehovah. And this may help us to understand what happened at the very outset of their pilgrimage. Israel was in Kadesh, or rather in the desert of Zin, the name Kadesh applying probably to the whole district as well as to a special locality. So large a number of people gathered in one place would naturally soon suffer from want of water. Let it also be remembered, that that generation knew of the wonders of the Lord chiefly by the hearing of the ear, but of His judgments by what they had seen of death sweeping away all who had come out of Egypt. In the hardness of their hearts it now seemed to them as if the prospect before them were hopeless, and they destined to suffer the same fate as their fathers. Something of this unbelieving despair appears in their cry, "Would God that we had died when our brethren died before Jehovah" (Numbers 20:3) - that is, by Divine judgment, during these years of wandering. The remembrance of the past with its disappointments seems to find expression in their complaints (20:5). It is as if they contrasted the stay of their nation in Egypt, and the hopes awakened on leaving it, with the disappointment of seeing the good land almost within their grasp, and then being turned back to die in the wilderness! And so the people broke forth in rebellion against Moses and against Aaron.

Feelings similar to theirs seem to have taken hold even on Moses and Aaron - only in a different direction. The people despaired of success, and rebelled against Moses and Aaron. With them as leaders they would never get possession of the Land of Promise. On the other hand, Moses and Aaron also despaired of success, and rebelled, as it were, against the people. Such an unbelieving people, rebelling at the very outset, would never be allowed to enter the land. The people felt as if the prospect before them were hopeless, and so did Moses and Aaron, although on opposite grounds. As we have said, the people rebelled against Moses and Aaron, and Moses and Aaron against the people. But at bottom, the ground of despair

and of rebellion, both on the part of the people and of Moses, was precisely the same. In both cases it was really unbelief of God. The people had looked upon Moses and not upon God as their leader into the land, and they had despaired. Moses looked at the people as they were in themselves, instead of thinking of God who now sent them forward, secure in His promise, which He would assuredly fulfill. This soon appeared in the conduct and language of Moses. By Divine direction he was to stand in sight of the people at "the rock before their eyes" with "the rod from before Jehovah" - no doubt the same with which the miracles had been wrought in Egypt, and under whose stroke water had once before sprung from the rock at Rephidim. (Exodus 17:6)

It is generally thought that the sin of Moses, in which Aaron shared, consisted in his striking the rock - and doing so twice - instead of merely speaking to it, "and it shall give forth its water;" and also, in the hasty and improper language which he used on the occasion, "Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?"

<sup>14</sup> But it seems difficult to accept this view. On the one hand, we can scarcely imagine that unbelief should have led Moses to strike, rather than to speak to the rock, as if the former would have been more efficacious than the latter. On the other hand, it seems strange that Moses should have been directed to "take the rod," if he were not to have used it, the more so as this had been the Divinely sanctioned mode of proceeding at Rephidim. (Exodus 17:6)

Lastly, how, in that case, could Aaron have been implicated in the sin of Moses? Of course, the striking the rock twice was, as we read in Psalm 106:32, 33, evidence that they had "angered" Moses, and that "his spirit was provoked." This also showed itself in his language, which Scripture thus characterizes, "he spake unadvisedly with his

<sup>14</sup> The great Rabbinical interpreter Rashi accounts for the twice striking by supposing that Moses went to the wrong rock, when, at the first stroke, only a few drops came, but at the second abundance of water. He finds the sin of Moses in his striking instead of speaking, since the people would, in the latter case, have argued - If the rock which neither speaks, hears, nor needs nourishment, obeys the voice of God, how much more are we bound so to do. The Jerusalem Targum has it, that at the first stroke blood came from the rock.

lips" - or, as the word literally means, "he babbled." <sup>15</sup> Be it observed, that Moses is not anywhere in Scripture blamed for striking instead of speaking to the rock, while it is expressly stated that the people "angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes.

The other aspect of the sin of Moses was afterwards expressly stated by the Lord Himself, when He pronounced on Moses and Aaron the sentence that they should not "bring this congregation into the land," which He had given them, on this ground:

"Because ye believed Me not, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel" (20:12).

Thus in their rebellion against Moses and Aaron, the people had not believed that Jehovah would bring them into the land which He had given them; while, in their anger at the people, Moses and Aaron had not believed God, to sanctify Him in His power and grace in the eyes of the children of Israel. Israel failed as the people of God; Moses as their mediator. Hitherto Moses had, under every provocation, been faithful as a steward over his charge, and pleaded with God and prevailed, because he believed. Now for the first time Moses failed, as we all fail, through unbelief, looking at the sin of the people, and thence inferring the impossibility of their inheriting the promises, instead of looking at the grace and power of God which made all things possible, and at the certainty of the promise. Unlike Abraham in similar circumstances, "he staggered at the promises." And having through unbelief failed as mediator of the people, his office was to cease, and the conduct of Israel into the land to devolve upon another.

It is only in this sense that we can accept the common statement, that the sin of Moses was official rather than personal. For these two - office or work, and person - cannot be separated either as regards responsibility or duty. Rather would we think of Moses and Aaron as aged pilgrims, worn with the long way through the wilderness, and footsore with its roughnesses and stones, whose strength momentarily failed when the weary

<sup>15</sup> The word, whether written bala or bada, means to talk foolishly, or rashly, to babble, also to boast.

journey was once more resumed, and who in their weariness stumbled at the rock of offense. Yet few events possess deeper pathos than this "babbling" at the waters of Meribah. Its true parallel is found not in the Old but in the New Testament. It is true that, in similar circumstances, Elijah also despaired of Israel, and was directed to "the mount of God," there to learn the same lesson as Moses - before, like him, he was unclothed of his office. But the full counterpart to the temptation of Moses is presented in the history of John the Baptist, when doubting, not the Person but the mode of working of the Messiah, and despairing, from what he saw and heard, of the fulfillment of the promise at that time and among that generation, he sent his disciples on that memorable embassy, just before he also was unclothed of his office. This is not the place to follow the subject further. Suffice it to point out, on the one hand, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, and, on the other, Joshua, Elisha, and our blessed Lord, as the types and antitypes presented to us in Scripture.

Before leaving Kadesh, Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom, and also, as we learn from Judges 11:17, to the king of Moab, <sup>16</sup> whose dominions lay on the north of Edom, asking permission for Israel to pass through their countries.

A glance at the map will show that this would have been the most direct route, if Palestine was to be entered from the other side Jordan at Jericho. Certainly it was the easiest route, as it avoided contact with those who held the Negeb, or south country, who thirty-seven years before had met Israel in hostile conflict and signally defeated them. (Numbers 14:44, 45) But in vain Moses urged upon Edom the claims of national kinship, Israel's past sufferings in Egypt, and their marvelous deliverance and guidance by The Angel of Jehovah. In vain also did he limit his request to permission to use the ordinary caravan road - "the king's highway" - without straying either to the right or the left, adding the promise of payment for the use of the wells. (Numbers 20:14-17) The

<sup>16</sup> The reply of the king of Moab is not mentioned in Scripture, because, upon the refusal of Edom, even his permission would have been of no use as the road to Moab lay through Edom.

children of Esau not only absolutely refused, but hastily gathered an army of observation on their borders. Meantime, while the messengers of Moses had gone on their embassy, the camp of Israel had moved forward to what may be described as "the uttermost of the border" of Edom. A day's journey eastward from Kadesh, through the wide and broad Wady Murreh, suddenly rises a remarkable mountain, quite isolated and prominent, which Canon Williams describes as "singularly formed," and the late Professor Robinson likens to "a lofty citadel." Its present name Moderah preserves the ancient Biblical Moserah, which, from a comparison of Numbers 20:22-29 with Deuteronomy 10:6, we know to have been only another designation for Mount Hor. In fact, "Mount Hor" or Hor-ha-Hor ("mountain, the mountain") just means "the remarkable mountain." This was the natural route for Israel to take, if they hoped to pass through Edom by the king's highway - the present Wady Ghuweir, - which would have led them by way of Moab, easily and straight, to the other side of Jordan. It was natural for them here to halt and await the reply of the king of Edom. For while Moderah lies at the very boundary, but still outside Edom, it is also at the entrance to the various wadies or roads, which thence open east, south, and south-west so that the children of Israel might thence take any route which circumstances would indicate. Moreover, from the height of Moderah they would be able to observe any hostile movement that might be directed against them, whether from the east by Edom, or from the north and west by the Amalekites and Canaanites. From what has been said, it will be gathered that we regard this as the Mount Hor where Aaron died.

The traditional site for Mount Hor is Jebel Harun, close by Petra, the capital of Edom. To state is already to refute a supposition which implies that Israel had asked leave to pass through Edom, and then, without awaiting the reply, marched into the heart of Edom, and camped for thirty days close by its capital! Moreover, it is difficult to understand what could have been the object of going so far south, if Israel hoped - as at the time they did - to strike through the nearest practicable wady, the road that led northward through Edom and Moab to the ford of Jordan. In that case Jebel

Harun would have been far out of their way. Finally, it is impossible to arrange the chronological succession of events as given in the Bible, except on the supposition that Moderah was Mount Hor. For, if the camp of Israel had been near Petra, there could have been no reason for the king of Arad to dread their forcing their way through his territory (Numbers 21:1), even as it seems most unlikely that he should have marched so far south-east as Petra to attack Israel. Accordingly, interpreters who regard Jebel Harun as Mount Hor are obliged to suppose that the attack of the king of Arad had taken place earlier, say, at the period indicated in Numbers 20:22. But in that case it is difficult to imagine how the king could have heard that Israel was "coming by the way of the spies," seeing they were taking exactly the opposite direction, and had just requested permission to pass through Edom. Against these weighty reasons we have only the authority of tradition in favor of Harun. On the other hand, all becomes plain, and easily understood, if we regard Moderah as Mount Hor; and the whole narrative in its chronological succession in Scripture is just what we should have expected. The reader who wishes further information is referred to the admirable work of the late Revelation E. Wilton on *The Negeb, or South Country of Scripture* (pp. 126-134), and to the excellent map attached to it.

Thus speedily, within a day's journey of the place of his sin, was the Divine sentence upon Aaron executed. There is a solemn grandeur about this narrative, befitting the occasion and in accordance with the locality. In the sight of all the congregation these three, Moses, Aaron, and Eleazar, went up the mount. In his full priestly dress walked Aaron to his burial. He knew it, and so did all in that camp, who now, for the last time, reverently and silently looked upon the venerable figure of him who, these forty years, had ministered unto them in holy things.<sup>17</sup>

There was no farewell. In that typical priesthood all depended on the unbroken continuance of the office, not of the person. And hence on that

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<sup>17</sup> According to Numbers 33:37, etc., Aaron died on the first day of the fifth month of the fortieth year after the Exodus, and at the age of one hundred and twenty-three years.

mountain-top Aaron was first unclothed of his priestly robes, and Eleazar, his son, formally invested with them. Thus the priesthood had not for a moment ceased when Aaron died. Then, not as a priest but simply as one of God's Israel, was he "gathered unto his people." But over that which passed between the three on the mount has the hand of God drawn the veil of silence. And so the new priest, Eleazar, came down from the solemn scene on Mount Hor to minister amidst a hushed and awe-stricken congregation. "And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel."

Serious tidings were now in store for Israel. The messengers returned from Edom bringing absolute refusal to the request of passage through that country. Not only so, but the large army of Edom was assembling on the frontier, close to the camping-ground of Israel. If, according to the Divine command, Edom was not to be attacked, then Israel must rapidly retreat. The ordinary route from Mount Hor "to compass the land of Edom," so as to advance northwards, by the east of Edom, would have led Israel straight down by the Wady El-Jeib, and so through the northern part of the Arabah. But this route touched the western boundary of Edom, just where, as we gather from the Scriptural narrative, the army of Edom was echeloned. To avoid them, it became therefore necessary, in the first place, to retrace their steps again through part of the Wady Murreh, in order thence to strike in a south-easterly direction through what are now known as "the mountains of the 'Azazimeh," the ancient dukedom of Teman, or Mount Paran. By this detour Israel would strike the Arabah far south of where the army of Edom awaited them, passing through the modern Wadies Ghudhaghidh and 'Adbah. In point of fact, we learn from Deuteronomy 10:7 that Gudgodah and Jotbath were the two stations reached next after the retreat from Mount Hor. But just at the point where the host of Israel would turn southwards from Wady Murreh, they were also in almost a straight line for the territory of the king of Arad. Of course, he would be informed that Israel had been refused a passage through Edom, and, finding them on the flank of his territory, would naturally imagine that they intended to invade it.

"And the Canaanitish king of Arad, which dwelt in the Negeb" <sup>18</sup> (or south country), "heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies" (or, more probably, "the way of the merchants," the caravan road); <sup>19</sup> "then he fought against Israel, and took of them prisoners" having probably fallen on their rearguard.

The event is mentioned for this twofold reason: to show the unprovoked enmity of Canaan against Israel, and the faithfulness of God. For Israel at that time "vowed a vow" utterly to destroy the cities of the Canaanites. And God hearkened and heard. Many years afterwards He gave the prayed-for victory, (Jude 1:17) when the name of Hormah or ban - utter destruction - given in prophetic anticipation of God's faithfulness, became a reality. <sup>20</sup>

**II\_21 Journey of the Children of Israel in "compassing" the land of Edom - The "Fiery Serpents" and the "Brazen Serpent" - Israel enters the land of the Amorites - Victories over Sihon and over Og, the kings of the Amorites and of Bashan - Israel camps in "the lowlands of Moab" close by the Jordan.**

**Numbers 21:3-35; 33:35-49; Deuteronomy 2 to 3**

THE opposition of Edom and the unprovoked attack of the Canaanite king of Arad must have convinced Israel that the most serious difficulties of their march had now commenced. It was quite natural that, during the thirty-eight years when they were scattered up and down in the Sinaitic peninsula, their powerful neighbors should have left them unmolested, as the wandering Bedouin are at this day. But when Israel again gathered together and moved forward as a host, then the tidings of the marvelous things which God had done for them, communicated with all the

<sup>18</sup> Arad is the modern Tell Arad, about twenty miles south of Hebron. So tenaciously do names cling to localities in the East.

<sup>19</sup> So Mr. Wilton rightly renders it, and not "the way of the spies," i.e. of the twelve men who had, thirty-eight years before, gone up to spy the land. Others translate, "the beaten track."

<sup>20</sup> Some commentators imagine that even at the first a great victory had been gained by the Israelites over the Canaanites. But the supposition is incompatible alike with the narrative and with other portions of Scripture.

circumstantiality common in the east, would excite mingled terror and a determination to resist them. The latter probably first; the former as resistance was seen to be vain, and the God of Israel realized as stronger than all other national deities. Eastern idolaters would naturally thus reason; and the knowledge of this will help our understanding of the Scriptural narrative.

The general direction of Israel's march, in order to "compass" the land of Edom, was first to the head of the Elanitic Gulf of the Red Sea, or the Gulf of 'Akabah. Thence they would, a few hours north of Ezion-geber (the giant's backbone), enter the mountains, and then pass northwards, marching to Moab "by the road which runs between Edom and the limestone plateau of the great eastern desert" (comp. Deuteronomy 2:8).

Probably they were prepared to contend forever fresh advance which they made northwards. But the first part of their journey was otherwise trying. That deep depression of the Arabah through which they marched - intensely hot, bare of vegetation, desolate, rough, and visited by terrible sandstorms - was pre-eminently "that great and terrible wilderness," of which Moses afterwards reminded the people. (Deuteronomy 1:19) What with the weariness of the way, the want of water, and of all food other than the manna, "the soul of the people was much discouraged," "and the people spake against God and against Moses." The judgment of "fiery serpents" which the Lord, "in punishment, sent among the people," and of which so many died bore a marked resemblance to all His former dealings. Once more He did not create a new thing for the execution of His purpose, but only disposed sovereignly of what already existed. Travelers give remarkable confirmation and illustrations of the number and poisonous character of the serpents in that district. Thus one writes of the neighborhood of the gulf: "The sand on the shore showed traces of snakes on every hand. They had crawled there in various directions. Some of the marks appeared to have been made by animals which could not have been less than two inches in diameter. My guide told me that snakes were very common in these regions." Another traveler on exactly the route of the children of Israel states: "In the afternoon a large

and very mottled snake was brought to us, marked with fiery spots and spiral lines, which evidently belonged, from the formation of its teeth, to one of the most poisonous species... The Bedouins say that these snakes, of which they have great dread, are very numerous in this locality." From the fact that the brazen serpent is also called "fiery" (a Saraph), we infer that the expression describes rather the appearance of these "fire-snakes" than the effect of their bite.

Two things are most marked in this history, the speedy repentance of Israel, couched in unwonted language of humility, (Numbers 21:7) and the marvelous teaching of the symbol, through which those who had been mortally bitten were granted restoration to life and health. Moses was directed to make a fiery serpent of brass, and to set it upon a pole, and whosoever looked upon it was immediately healed. From the teaching of our Lord (John 3:14, 15) we know that this was a direct type of the lifting up of the Son of Man, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." The simplicity of the remedy - only to look up in faith, its immediateness and its completeness as well as the fact that this was the only but also the all-sufficient remedy for the deadly wound of the serpent - all find their counterpart in the Gospel. But for the proper understanding both of the type and of the words of our Lord, we must inquire in what manner Israel would view and understand the lifting up of the brazen serpent and the healing that flowed from it. Undoubtedly, Israel would at once connect this death through the fiery serpents with the introduction of death into Paradise through the serpent.

And now a brazen serpent was lifted up, made in the likeness of the fiery serpent, yet without its poisonous bite. And this was for the healing of Israel. Clearly then, the deadly poison of the fiery serpent was removed in the uplifted brazen serpent! All this would carry back the mind to the promise given when first the poisonous sting of the serpent was felt, that the Seed of the Woman should bruise the head of the serpent, and that in so doing His own heel should be bruised. In this sense even the apocryphal Book of Wisdom (16:6) designates the brazen serpent "a symbol of



salvation." And so we are clearly taught that "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh;" (Romans 8:3) that

"He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; (2 Corinthians 5:21)

and that

"His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." (1 Peter 2:24)

The precious meaning of the type is thus deduced by Luther from the three grand peculiarities of this "symbol of salvation:" "First, the serpent which Moses made at the command of God had to be of brass or copper, that is, red, and like those fiery serpents, which were red, and burning in their bite - yet without poison. Secondly, the brazen serpent had to be set up on a pole for a sign" (comp. Colossians 2:14, etc.). "Thirdly, those who would be healed of the fiery serpents bite must look up to the brazen serpent, lifted up on the pole" (perceive, and believe), "else they could not recover nor live." Similarly a modern German critic thus annotates John 3:14:

"Christ is the antitype of this serpent, inasmuch as He took upon Himself and vicariously bore sin, the most noxious of all noxious powers."

It is of the deepest interest to follow the march of the children of Israel, when every day's journey brought them nearer to the Land of Promise as their goal. To them it was not, as to us, a land of ruins and of memories, but of beauty and of hope. To a people who had all their lives seen and known nothing but "the wilderness," the richness, fertility, and varied beauty of Palestine, as it then was, must have possessed charms such as we can scarcely imagine. Then every step in advance was, so to speak, under the direct leading of God, and, in a sense, a miracle, while every such leading and miracle was itself a pledge of others yet to follow. The researches of modern travelers<sup>21</sup> enable us almost to company with Israel on this their march.

<sup>21</sup> We cannot, of course, here enter on a description of these localities as illustrative of the Bible, however interesting the subject. For further information we direct the reader, besides the works of Professor Robinson, Canon Williams, Mr. Wilton, and Professor Palmer, to Canon Tristram's Land of Moab, especially illustrative of this part of our history.

As already stated, the wonderful tenacity with which old names keep their hold in the far East helps us to discover the exact spots of Biblical scenes; while, on the other hand, descriptions of the localities throw most vivid light on the Scriptural narratives, and afford evidence of their trustworthiness.

The reader ought to remember that the route which lay before Israel was in part the same as that still traversed by the great caravans from Damascus to Mecca. The territories which they successively passed or entered were occupied as follows. First, Israel skirted along the eastern boundary of Edom, leaving it on their left. The western boundary of Edom, through which Israel had sought a passage when starting from Kadesh, (Numbers 20:18) would from its mountainous character and few passes have been easily defended against the Israelites. But it was otherwise with the eastern line of frontier, which lay open to Israel, had they not been Divinely directed not to fight against Edom. (Deuteronomy 2:4-6) This, however, explains the friendly attitude which the Edomites found it prudent to adopt along their eastern frontier, (Deuteronomy 2:29) although their army had shortly before been prepared to fight on the western. At Ije Abarim,<sup>22</sup> "the ruins," or "the hills of the passages," or "of the sides" -perhaps "the lateral hills" the Israelites were approaching the wilderness which lay to the east of Moab.

The brook or Wady Zared (Numbers 21:12) here forms the boundary between Edom and Moab. But as Israel had been also commanded not to fight against Moab, (Deuteronomy 2:9) they left their territory equally untouched, and, continuing straight northwards, passed through the wilderness of Moab, until they reached the river Arnon, the modern Wady Moab, which formed the boundary between the Moabites and the Amorites. The territory of the Amorites stretched from the Arnon to the Jabbok. It had originally belonged to the Moabites; (Numbers 21:26) but they had been driven southwards by the Amorites. No command of God prevented Israel from warring against the

<sup>22</sup> There is reason to suppose that Abarim, or "passages," was a generic name for the mountains which bordered the territory of Moab.

Amorites, and when Sihon, their king, refused to give them a free passage through his territory, they were Divinely directed to that attack which issued in the destruction of Sihon, and the possession of his land by Israel.

At the brook Zared - on the southern boundary of Moab - the Israelites had already been in a line with the Dead Sea, leaving it, of course, far on their left. The river Arnon also, which formed the boundary between Moab and the Amorites, flows into the Dead Sea almost opposite to Hazazon-tamar, or En-gedi. This tract, which now bears the name of el-Belkah, is known to the reader of the Old Testament as the land Gilead, while in New Testament times it formed the province of Perea. Lastly, the district north of the Jabbok and east of the Jordan was the ancient Bashan, or the modern Hauran. The fact that the country north of the Arnon had, before its possession by the Amorites, been so long held by Moab explains the name "Fields of Moab" (rendered in the Authorized Version "country of Moab," Numbers 21:20) as applied to the upland hills of Gilead, just as the western side of Jordan similarly bore the name of "the plains of Moab," or rather "the lowlands of Moab." (Numbers 22:1) The children of Israel were still camped on the south side of the Arnon when they sent the embassy to Sihon, demanding a passage through his territory. Canon Tristram has given a most vivid description of the rift through which the Arnon flows. Its width is calculated at about three miles from crest to crest, and its depth at 2,150 feet from the top of the southern, and at 1,950 from that of the northern bank. Of course, the army of Israel could not have passed the river here, but higher up, to the east, "in the wilderness." (Numbers 21:13) They probably waited until the messengers returned from Sihon. How high their courage and confidence in God had risen, when tidings arrived that Sihon with all his army was coming to meet them, appears even from those extracts of poetic pieces which form so marked a peculiarity of the Book of Numbers, and which read like stanzas of war-songs by the camp-fires. <sup>23</sup> From the banks of the Arnon the route of

Israel was no doubt northward till they reached Bamoth or Bamolh Baal, "the heights of Baal," (Numbers 21:19) one of the stations afterwards taken up by Balak and Balaam. (Numbers 22:41) "And from Bamoth (they marched) to the valley, which is in the fields of Moab (on the plateau of Moab), on the height of Pisgah, and looks over to the face of the wilderness," that is, over the tract of land which extends to the north-eastern shore of the Dead Sea. (Numbers 21:20).

From this plateau on the mountains of the Abarim, of which Pisgah and Nebo were peaks, Israel had its first view of the Land of Promise, and especially of that mysterious Sea of Salt whose glittering surface and deathlike surroundings would recall such solemn memories and warnings. At last then the goal was in view! The decisive battle between Sihon and Israel was fought almost within sight of the Dead Sea. The victory at Jahaz, in which Sihon was smitten "with the edge of the sword" - that is, without quarter or sparing, - gave Israel possession of the whole country, including Heshbon and "all the daughters thereof" - or daughter-towns, - from the Arnon to the upper Jabbok (the modern Nahr Amman). The latter river formed the boundary between the Amorites and the Ammonites. Beyond this the Amorites had not penetrated, because "the border of the children of Ammon was strong." (Numbers 21:24) And Israel also forbore to penetrate farther, not on the same ground as the Amorites, but because of an express command of God. (Deuteronomy 2:19) Leaving untouched therefore the country of Ammon, the Israelites next moved northward, defeated Og, king of Bashan, and took possession of his territory also, and of the mountains of Gilead. <sup>24</sup> The whole country east of the Jordan was now Israel's, and the passage of that river could not be disputed.

Before actually entering upon their long-promised inheritance, some great lessons had, indeed, yet to be learned. An event would take place which

<sup>23</sup> Not less than three of these "songs" are quoted in Numbers 21. We cannot here refer further to these deeply interesting compositions. Similarly, it is impossible to enter into

fuller geographical details, or to compare the list of stations in Numbers 21 with that in chap. 33: and in Deuteronomy 2. But the most perfect harmony prevails between them.

<sup>24</sup> These territories and their ancient sites have of late been visited and described by such travelers as Canon Tristram, Professor Palmer, and others.

would forever mark the relation between the kingdom of God and that of this world. The mission of Moses, the servant of the Lord, must also come to an end, and the needful arrangements be made for possessing and holding the land of Palestine. But all these belong, strictly speaking, to another period of Israel's history. When the camp was pitched in Shittim, "on this side Jordan by Jericho," waiting for the signal to cross the boundary line, the wanderings of the children of Israel were really at an end.

### Volume III – Israel in Canaan under Joshua and the Judges

#### Preface

THE history of Israel as a nation may be said to commence with their entrance into their own land. All previous to this - from the Paschal night on which Israel was born as a people to the overthrow of Sihon and of Og, the last who would have barred Israel's way to their home - had been only preparatory. During the forty years' wanderings the people had, so to speak, been welded together by the strong hand of Jehovah. But now, when the Lion of Judah couched by the banks of Jordan, Israel was face to face with its grand mission, and the grand task of its national life commenced: to dispossess heathenism, and to plant in its stead the kingdom of God (Psalm 80:8-11), which was destined to strike root and to grow, till, in the fullness of time, it would extend to all nations of the world.<sup>25</sup>

Accordingly, when the camp of Israel was pitched at Shittim, a new period commenced. Its history records, first, certain events which had to take place immediately before entering the Land of Promise; next, the conquest, and then the apportionment of the land among the tribes of Israel; and, lastly, in the time of the Judges, side by side, the unfolding of Israel's religious and national condition, and the assertion of those fundamental principles which underlay its very existence as a God-called people. These principles are: - The special relationship of Israel as the

people of God towards Jehovah, and Jehovah's special dealings towards them as their King.<sup>26</sup>

The history of the wilderness period had, indeed, been shaped by this two-fold relationship, but its consequences appeared more clearly under Joshua, and most fully in the time of the Judges. When not only Moses, but Joshua, and even the elders who had been his contemporaries had passed away, the people, now settled in the land, were left free to develop those tendencies which had all along existed. Then ensued that alternation of national apostasy and judgment, and of penitent return to God and deliverance, which constitutes, so to speak, the framework on which the Book of Judges is constructed. This part of Israel's history attained alike its highest and its lowest point in Samson, with whom the period of the Judges appropriately closes. For, the administration of Samuel forms only the transition to, and preparation for the establishment of royalty in Israel. But the spiritual import of the whole history of that period is summed up in these words of Holy Scripture (Psalm 44:2-4):

"Thou didst drive out the heathen with Thy hand, and plantedst them: Thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but Thy right hand, and Thine arm, and the light of Thy countenance, because Thou hadst a favor unto them. Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob."

The Books of Joshua and of the Judges form the two first portions of what in the Hebrew Canon are designated as the "Former Prophets." This, not because their narratives are largely connected with the rise and activity of the prophets, nor yet because their authors were prophets, but rather because the character and contents of these books are prophetic.

They give the history of Israel from the prophet's point of view - not a succinct and successive chronicle of the nation, but a history of the Kingdom of God in Israel. This also explains its peculiarities of form and style. For, neither are the

<sup>25</sup> Comp. such a Missionary Psalm as the 87th; also such passages as Psalm 96:9; Isaiah 44:5.

<sup>26</sup> Some modern negative critics have even broached the theory - of course, wholly unfounded - that originally the Book of Joshua had formed with the five books of Moses Hexateuch.

Judges, for example, mentioned in the order of their succession, nor must it be supposed that they ruled over all the tribes of Israel. Similarly, there are evidently large blanks left in the history of the times, and while some events or reigns of considerable duration are only cursorily mentioned, very detailed and circumstantial narratives are given of persons and occurrences, which only occupied the scene for a comparatively short period. But as, from the frequent references to authorities, and from their evident knowledge of details, the writers of these books must have had at command ample material for a full history, we conclude that the selection, Divinely guided, was made in accordance with the "Spirit of Prophecy," to mark the progress of the Kingdom of God in connection with Israel.

From what has been said it will be readily understood, that the history traced in this volume offers peculiar difficulties - from its briefness, its abruptness, its rapid transitions, the unusual character of its incidents, and its sudden and marked Divine interpositions. These difficulties are not so much exegetical or critical - although such are certainly not wanting - but rather concern the substance of the narratives themselves, and touch the very essence of Holy Scripture. For myself, I am free to confess that I entered on my present undertaking, I shall not say with apprehension but with great personal diffidence. I knew, indeed, that what appears a difficulty might find its full and satisfactory solution, even though I were not able to indicate it, and that a narrative might have its Divine meaning and spiritual purpose, even though I should fail to point it out. Yet I imagine that most readers of the Books of Joshua and Judges will in some measure understand and sympathize with my feelings. All the more is it now alike duty and privilege, at the close of these investigations, to express it joyously and thankfully, that the more fully these narratives are studied, the more luminous will they become; the more will their Divine meaning appear; and the more will they carry to the mind conviction of their truthfulness, and to the heart lessons of their spiritual import. Perhaps I may be allowed in illustration of these statements to point to my study of the characters of Balaam and Joshua, and

of the histories of Gideon, of Jephthah, and especially of Samson.

From this circumstance, and faithful to the plan, which I proposed to myself in this series, of gradually leading a reader onwards, the sacred narrative has received in this volume more full treatment - the discussion of such textual questions as fell within its scope, being, however, chiefly thrown into the footnotes. Many questions, indeed, on which I could have earnestly wished to enter, lay quite outside the purport of the present series, and had therefore reluctantly to be left aside. These concern chiefly the antiquity and the authenticity of these books of Holy Scripture. I venture to think, that a great deal yet remains to be said on these points - the chief defect of former treatises lying, in my opinion, in this, that they rather busy themselves with refuting the arguments of opponents, than bring forward what I would call the positive evidence. That such positive evidence abundantly exists, a somewhat careful study has increasingly convinced me. I am not ashamed to own my belief that, notwithstanding confident assertions of writers on the opposite side, we may trustfully and contentedly walk in "the old paths;" and the present volume is intended as a reverent contribution, however inadequate, towards the better understanding of what, I verily believe, "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Spirit," and that, "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

### **III\_01 Israel About To Take Possession Of The Land Of Promise - Decisive Contest Showing The Real Character Of Heathenism - Character And History Of Balaam.**

#### **Numbers 22**

THE wilderness-life and the early contests of Israel were over. Israel stood on the threshold of the promised possession, separated from it only by the waters of Jordan. But, before crossing that boundary-line, it was absolutely necessary that the people should, once and for all, gain full knowledge of the real character of heathenism in its relation to the kingdom of God. Israel must learn that the heathen nations were not only hostile political powers, opposing their progress, but that heathenism itself was in its nature antagonistic to

the kingdom of God. The two were incompatible, and therefore no alliance could ever be formed with heathenism, no intercourse cultivated, nor even its presence tolerated. This was the lesson which, on the eve of entering Palestine, Israel was to learn by painful experience in connection with the history of Balaam. Its importance at that particular period will readily be understood. Again and again was the same lesson taught throughout the history of Israel, as each alliance or even contact with the kingdoms of this world brought fresh sorrow and trouble. Nor is its application to the Church of God, so far as concerns the danger of commixture with, and conformity to the world, less obvious. And so the history of Balak and of Balaam has, besides its direct lessons, a deep meaning for all times.

With the decisive victories over Sihon and over Og, all who could have barred access to the Land of Promise had been either left behind, or else scattered and defeated. And now the camp of Israel had moved forward, in the language of Scripture, to "the other side Jordan from Jericho."<sup>27</sup> Their tents were pitched in rich meadow-land, watered by many streams, which rush down from the neighboring mountains - Arboth, or lowlands of Moab, as the country on this and that side the river was still called, after its more ancient inhabitants.<sup>28</sup>

As the vast camp lay scattered over a width of several miles, from Abel Shittim, "the meadow of the acacias," in the north, to Beth Jeshimoth, "the house of desolations," on the edge of the desert, close to the Dead Sea, in the south (Numbers 33:49), it might have seemed as if the lion of Judah were couching ready for his spring on the prey. But was he the lion of Judah, and were the promises of God to him indeed "yea and amen?" A fiercer assault, and one in which heathenism would wield other arms than those which had so lately been broken in their hands, would soon decide that question.

<sup>27</sup> Or, "across the Jordan of Jericho," i.e., that part of the Jordan which watered Jericho.

<sup>28</sup> The name Arboth still survives in the Arabah, which stretches from a little farther south to the Elanitic Gulf of the Red Sea.

We can perceive many reasons why Moab, though apparently not immediately threatened, should, at that special moment, have come forward as the champion and representative of heathenism (Numbers 22:1-3). True, Israel had left their land untouched, restrained by express Divine command from invading it (Deuteronomy 2:9). But their close neighborhood was dangerous. Besides, had not all that land north of the Arnon, which Israel had just wrested from the Amorites, been till lately Moabitish - the very name of Moab still lingering on mountain-plateau and lowland plains; and might not Moab again have what once it held? But there was far more involved than either fear or cupidity suggested. The existence alike of heathen nations and of heathenism itself depended on the issue. There can be no doubt that the prophetic anticipation of the song of Moses (Exodus 15:14-16) had already in great part been fulfilled. "The nations" had "heard" of God's marvelous doings for Israel, and were afraid; "the mighty men of Moab, trembling" had taken "hold upon them." Among the wandering tribes of the east, tidings, especially of this kind, travel fast. Jethro had heard them long before (Exodus 18:1), and the testimony of Rahab (Joshua 2:9) shows how fear and dread had fallen upon the inhabitants of the land. Force of arms had been tried against them. The Amorites, who had been able to wrest from Moab all the land north of the Arnon, had boldly marched against Israel under the leadership of Sihon their king, and been not only defeated but almost exterminated. A similar fate had befallen the brave king of Bashan and his people. There could be no question that so far Jehovah, the God of Israel, had proved true to His word, and stronger than the gods of the nations who had been subdued. Farther progress, then, in the same direction might prove fatal alike to their national existence, their national deities, and their national religion.

In trying to realize the views and feelings of heathenism under such circumstances, we must beware of transporting into them our modern ideas. In our days the question is as to the acknowledgment or else the denial of Jehovah God. In those days it turned upon the acknowledgment or the opposite of Jehovah as the only true and living God, as this is expressed in



the first commandment. Heathenism would never have thought of denying the existence or power of Jehovah as the national God of the Hebrews (see, for example, 1 Kings 20:23; 2 Kings 18:25, 33-35). What it controverted was, that Jehovah was the only God - all others being merely idols, the work of men's hands. Prepared as they were to acknowledge Jehovah as the national Deity of the Hebrews, the question before them would be, whether He or their gods were the more powerful. It was a point of the deepest interest to them, since, if anything were known of Jehovah, it would be this, that He was "a jealous God," and that the rites by which He was worshipped were so different from theirs, as to involve an entire change, not only of religion, but of popular habits and manners. From what has been stated, it will be understood why, in attempting to break the power of Israel, whose God had hitherto - whether from accident, fate, or inherent power - proved Himself superior to those of the nations, the king of Moab had, in the first place, recourse to "divination," and why he was so specially anxious to secure the services of Balaam.

Balaam, or rather Bileam, the son of Beor,<sup>29</sup> belonged apparently to a family of magicians who resided at Pethor, possibly, as has been suggested, a city of professional soothsayers or students of that craft, but certainly situated in "Aram" or Mesopotamia, and on the banks of the Euphrates (Numbers 22:5; 23:7; Deuteronomy 23:4). His name, which means "devourer," or "swallower up," and that of his father, which means "burner up," or "destroyer" - whether given them at birth, or, as is so common in the East, from their supposed characteristics - indicate alike the claims which they put forth and the estimate in which they were popularly held.<sup>30</sup> If, as has been conjectured,<sup>31</sup> Balak, the king of Moab, was of

Midianitish origin (his father having been a Midianitish usurper), it becomes all the more intelligible that in his peculiar circumstances he would apply for advice and help to the Midianites; that he would ally himself with them; and that through them he would come to know of, and along with them send for, Balaam (Numbers 22:4, 7, etc.).

At any rate, those Midianite wanderers of the desert which stretched between Mesopotamia and the dominions of Moab would, like modern Bedawin under similar circumstances, not only know of the existence of a celebrated magician like Balaam, but probably greatly exaggerate his power. Moreover, being themselves unable to attack Israel, they would nevertheless gladly make common cause with Moab, and that, although for the present their territory was not directly threatened, any more than that of the Moabites. This explains the alliance of Moab and Midian and their common embassy to Balaam.

The object in view was twofold. As already explained, the success of Israel as against the nations, or rather that of Israel's God against their deities, might, in their opinion, arise from one of two causes. Either their own national deities - Chemosh and Baal - had not been sufficiently propitiated - sufficient influence or power had not been brought to bear upon them; or else Jehovah was really stronger than they. In either case Balaam would bring invaluable, and, if he only chose to exert it, sure help. For, according to heathen views, a magician had absolute and irresistible power with the gods; power was inherent in him or in the incantations which he used. And herein lay one of the fundamental differences between heathenism and the Old Testament, between magic and miracles. In the former it was all of man, in the latter it was shown to be all of God. No prophet of the Lord ever had or claimed power, like the magicians; but in every case the gracious influence was specially, and for that time, transmitted directly from God. Only the God-Man had power in Himself, so that His every contact brought health and life. And in the Christian dispensation also, however much of the supernatural there may be experienced and witnessed, nothing is magical; there is no mere

<sup>29</sup> By a peculiar Aramaic interchange of letters, St. Peter writes the name Bosor: 2 Peter 2:15

<sup>30</sup> It is of curious interest, that precisely the same names occur in the royal Edomitish family: Genesis 36:32.

<sup>31</sup> By Bishop Harold Browne, from the analogy of his father's name to that of later Midianite chiefs - the name Zippor, "bird," reminding us of Oreb, "crow," and Zeeb, "wolf." The later Targumim also regard Balak as of Midianitish origin.

exercise of power or of authority; but all is conveyed to us through the free promises of God, and in the dispensation of His grace.

But to return. Supposing that Jehovah were really superior to Chemosh and Baal, the king of Moab and his associates would none the less desire the aid of Balaam. For it was a further principle of heathenism, that national deities might be induced to transfer their blessing and protection from one nation to another. Thus the ancient Romans were wont, when laying siege to a foreign city, solemnly to invite its special gods to come out to them and join their side, promising them in return not only equal but higher honors than they had hitherto enjoyed. And if something of this kind were now needful - if influence was to be exerted on the God of the Israelites, who was so capable of it as Balaam, both from his profession as a dealer with the gods, and from his special qualifications? And this leads up to the principal personage in this history, to his character, and to the question of his religion.<sup>32</sup>

What has been said of the knowledge which the king of Moab must have possessed of Jehovah's dealings in reference to Israel (Exodus 15:14-16) applies, of course, with much greater force to Balaam himself. As a professional magician, belonging to a family of magicians, and residing at one of their chief seats, it was alike his duty and his interest to acquaint himself with such matters. Moreover, we ought not to forget that, in the place of his residence, traditions of Abraham would linger with that Eastern local tenacity which we have already had so frequent occasion to notice. Indeed, we have positive evidence that Balaam's

inquiries had gone back far beyond the recent dealings of Jehovah to His original covenant-relationship towards His people. A comparison of the promise of God to Abraham in Genesis 13:16 with the mode of expression used by Balaam in Numbers 23:10; still more - the correspondence between Genesis 49:9 and Numbers 23:24, 24:9 in his description of Judah; but most of all, the virtual repetition of the prophecy Genesis 49:10 in Numbers 24:17, prove beyond doubt that Balaam had made himself fully acquainted with the promises of Jehovah to Israel. That a professional soothsayer like Balaam should have been quite ready, upon a review of their whole history, to acknowledge Jehovah as the national God of Israel, and to enter - if the expression may be allowed - into professional relationship with such a powerful Deity, seems only natural in the circumstances. This explains his conduct in speaking to and of Jehovah, and apparently owning Him. But in all this Balaam did not advance a step beyond the mere heathen point of view, any more than Simon Magus when, "beholding the miracles and signs which were done," "he was baptized;" (Acts 8:13) nor did his conduct bring him nearer to the true service of Jehovah than were those seven sons of Sceva to that of Christ, when they endeavored to cast out evil spirits in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:13, 14). In fact, Scripture designates him uniformly by the word *Kosem*, which is the distinctive term for heathen soothsayers in opposition to prophets of the Lord. And with this his whole conduct agrees. Had he possessed even the most elementary knowledge of Jehovah as the only true and living God, or the most rudimentary understanding of His covenant-purposes, he could not, considering his acquaintance with previous prophecy, have for a moment entertained the idea of allying himself with Balak against Israel. On the other hand, if, according to his view of the matter, he could have succeeded in making the God of Israel, so to speak, one of his patron-deities, and if, upon his own terms, he could have become one of His prophets; still more, if he could have gained such influence with Him as to turn Him from His purpose regarding Israel, then would he have reached the goal of his ambition, and become by far the most powerful magician in

<sup>32</sup> As this is not the place for theological or critical discussion, I will only remark, that I cannot accept either of the opposing views of Balaam's character - that he was a true prophet of Jehovah, or that he was simply "a prophet of the devil," "who was compelled by God, against his will, to bless." But as little do I profess myself able to receive, or even properly to understand, the view of recent critics (Hengsterberg, Kurtz, Keil, Bishop Harold Browne, etc.), that Balaam "was in a transition state from one to the other," that "he knew and confessed Jehovah, sought and found him;" but that, "on the other hand, he was not sufficiently advanced in the knowledge and service of Jehovah to throw overboard every kind of heathen augury." I have, therefore, subjected the whole question to fresh investigation, the results of which are given in the text.

the world. Thus, in our opinion, from the time when we first meet him, standing where the two roads part, to the bitter end of his treachery, when, receiving the reward of Judas, he was swept away in the destruction of Midian, his conduct was throughout consistently heathen, and his progress rapid in the downward course.

Where the two roads part! In every great crisis of history, and, we feel persuaded, in the great crisis of every individual life, there is such a meeting and parting of the two ways - to life or to destruction. It was so in the case of Pharaoh, when Moses first brought him the summons of the Lord to let His people go free, proving his authority by indubitable signs. And Balaam stood at the meeting and parting of the two ways that night when the ambassadors of Balak and the elders of Midian were for the first time under his roof. That embassy was the crisis in his history. He had advanced to the knowledge that Jehovah, the God of Israel, was God. The question now came: Would he recognize Him as the only true and living God, with Whom no such relationship could exist as those which heathenism supposed; towards Whom every relationship must be moral and spiritual, not magical - one of heart and of life service, not of influence and power? To use New Testament language, in his general acknowledgment of Jehovah, Balaam had advanced to the position described in the words: "he that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9:50). But this is only, as it were, the meeting and parting of the two roads. The next question which comes is far deeper, and decisive, so far as each individual is concerned. It refers to our relationship to the Person of Christ. And in regard to this we read: "He that is not with Me is against Me" (Matthew 12:30).

As always in such circumstances, God's great mercy and infinite patience and condescension were not wanting to help Balaam in the crisis of his life. There could, at least, be no doubt on two points. Balak's avowed wish had been, by the help of Balaam, to "smite" Israel and "drive them out of the land" (Numbers 22:6); and his expressed conviction, "he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." Now, not to speak of the implied magical power thus attributed

to him, Balaam must have known that Balak's intention ran directly counter to Jehovah's purpose, while the words, in which the power of blessing and cursing was ascribed to Balaam, were not only a transference to man of what belonged to God alone, but must have been known to Balaam as the very words in which Jehovah had originally bestowed the blessing on Abraham:

"I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" (Genesis 12:3).

That Balaam so knew these words appears from his own quotation of them in Numbers 24:9. The proposal of Balak therefore ran directly counter to the fundamental purpose of God, as Balaam knew it - and yet he could hesitate even for a single moment! But this is not all. In His infinite long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, God even now condescended to Balaam. He had proposed to the ambassadors of Balak that they should "lodge" with him that night, and that on the morrow he would make his reply, as Jehovah would speak unto him. And Jehovah did condescend to meet Balaam in his own way, and that night fully communicated to him His will. The garbled and misrepresenting account of it, which Balaam in the morning gave to his guests, finally marked his choice and decided his fate.

But why did Jehovah God appear to, or deal with such an one as Balaam? Questions like these ought, with our limited knowledge of God's purposes, not always to be entertained. In the present instance, however, we can suggest at least some answer. Of God's purpose, so far as Balaam's personal condition was concerned, we have already spoken. But a wider issue was here to be tried. Balak had sent for Balaam in order through his magic to destroy Israel, or rather to arrest and turn aside the wonder-working power of Jehovah. It was, therefore, really a contest between heathenism and Israel as the people of God, which would exhibit and decide the real relationship between Israel and the heathen world, or in other words, between the Church of God and the kingdoms of this world. And as formerly God had raised up Pharaoh to be the instrument of bringing down the gods of Egypt, so would He now decide this contest through the very man whom Balak had chosen as its champion - using him as a willing

instrument, if he yielded, or as an unwilling, if he rebelled, but in any case as an efficient instrument for carrying out His own purposes. It is in this manner that we regard God's meeting Balaam, and His speaking both to him and through him.

Three brief but emphatic utterances had God in that first night made to Balaam:

"Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed" (Numbers 22:12).

Of these Balaam, in his reply to the ambassadors next morning, had deliberately suppressed the last two (22:13). Yet they were the most important, as showing the utter hopelessness of the undertaking, and the utter powerlessness of any man to control or influence the purpose of God. He thus withheld knowledge of the utmost importance for understanding alike the character of the true God and that of His true servants, who simply obey, but do not seek to control, His will. But even in what he did repeat of God's message there was grievous misrepresentation. For this statement, "Jehovah refuses to give me leave to go with you" (22:13), implied an ungrounded arbitrariness on the part of God; confirmed Balak in his heathen views; and perhaps encouraged him to hope for better results under more favorable circumstances. As for Balaam himself, we may be allowed to infer, that he misunderstood God's appearance to, and conversation with him, as implying a sort of league with, or acknowledgment of him, while all the time he had irrevocably departed from God, and entered the way of sin and of judgment.

Accordingly, we find Balaam thenceforth speaking of Jehovah as "my God," and confidently assuming the character of His servant. At the same time, he secured for himself the presents of Balak, while, in his reply, he took care not to lose the favor of the king, but rather to make him all the more anxious to gain his aid, since he was owned of Jehovah, Who had only refused a leave which on another occasion He might grant.

It was under these circumstances that a second embassy from Balak and Midian, more honorable than the first, and with almost unlimited promises, came again to ask Balaam "to curse this people" (ver. 17). The king had well judged. With no spiritual, only a heathen acknowledgment of Jehovah, covetousness and ambition were the main

actuating motives of Balaam. In the pithy language of the New Testament (2 Peter 2:15), he "loved the wages of unrighteousness." But already his course was sealed. Refusing to yield himself a willing, he would now be made the unwilling instrument of exalting Jehovah. And thus God gave him leave to do that on which he had set his heart, with this important reservation, however: "But yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do." Balaam, whose blinded self-satisfaction had already appeared in his profession to the ambassadors, that he could "not go beyond the word of Jehovah his God," understood not the terrible judgment upon himself implied in this "let him alone," which gave up the false prophet to his own lusts. He had no doubt been so far honest, although he was grossly and willfully ignorant of all that concerned Jehovah, when he proposed to consult God a second time, whether he might curse Israel. And now it seemed as if God had indeed inclined to him. Balaam was as near reaching the ideal of a magician, and having "power," as was Simon Magus when he offered the apostles money to bestow on him the power of imparting the Holy Ghost.

It was no doubt on account of this spirit of deluded self satisfaction, in which next morning he accompanied the ambassadors of Balak, that "God's anger was kindled because he went," <sup>33</sup> and that "the angel of Jehovah stood in the way for an adversary against him" - significantly, the angel of the covenant with a drawn sword, threatening destruction. The main object of what happened to him on the journey was, if possible, to arouse Balaam to a sense of his utter ignorance of, and alienation from Jehovah. And so even "the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbad the madness of the prophet" (2 Peter 2:16).

We know, indeed, that animals are often more sensitive to the presence or nearness of danger than man - as it were, perceive what escapes our senses. But in this case the humiliating lesson was, that while the self-satisfied prophet had absolutely seen nothing, his ass had perceived the presence of

<sup>33</sup> Literally, "because he was going." Keil rightly points out that the use of the participle here implies, that God's anger was kindled by the spirit and disposition in which he was going, rather than by the fact of his going.

the angel, and, by going out of the way, or falling down, saved the life of his master; and that, even so, Balaam still continued blinded, perverse, and misunderstanding, till God opened the mouth of the dumb animal, so that with man's voice it might forbid the madness of the prophet. To show Balaam himself as he really was, and the consequences of his conduct; and to do so in the strongest, that is, in this case, in the most humiliating manner, such was the object of the apparition of the angel, and of the human language in which Balaam heard the ass reproving him.<sup>34</sup>

But even this produced no real effect - only an offer on the part of Balaam to get him back again, if it displeased the angel of Jehovah (22:34). The proposal was as blundering, and argued as deep ignorance, as his former readiness to go with the ambassadors. For the question was not simply one of going or not going, but of glorifying God, and acknowledging the supremacy of His covenant-purpose. Balaam might have gone and returned without doing this; but Jehovah would now do it Himself through Balaam. And already the elders of Moab and Midian had hurried on along with Balaam's own servants, to announce the arrival of the prophet. Presently from the lonely, terrible interview with the angel was he to pass into the presence of the representative of that heathenism against which the drawn sword in the angel's hand was really stretched out.

### III\_02 The "Prophecies" Of Balaam - The End Of Balaam - Parallel Between Balaam And Judas

#### Numbers 22:36 to 31:20

THE meeting between the king of Moab and the soothsayer took place at Ir Moab, the "city" or capital of Moab, close by its northern boundary. It commenced with gentle reproaches on the part of the monarch, which, Eastern-like, covered large promises, to which the soothsayer replied by repeating his old profession of being only able to speak the word that God would put in his mouth.

<sup>34</sup> This is not the place to enter into critical discussions. The great matter is to understand the meaning and object of this narrative, in whatever manner the "man's voice" may have issued from the "dumb ass," or the human language have reached the consciousness of Balaam

There is no need of assuming hypocrisy on his part; both monarch and soothsayer acted quite in character and quite consistently. From Ir Moab they proceeded to Kirjath Huzoth, "the city of streets," the later Kiriathaim.<sup>35</sup>

Here, or in the immediate neighborhood, the first sacrifices were offered, Balaam as well as "the princes" taking part in the sacrificial meal. Next morning, Balak took the soothsayer to the lofty heights of Mount Attarus, to Bamoth Baal "the heights of Baal," so-called because that plateau was dedicated to the service of Baal. The spot, which also bears the names of Baal-meon, Beth Baal-meon, and Beth-meon, commands a magnificent view. Although "too far recessed to show the depression of the Dead Sea," the view northwards stretches as far as Jerusalem, Gerizim, Tabor, Hermon, and Mount Gilead. But, although the eye could sweep so far over the Land of Promise, he would, from the conformation of the mountains, only see "the utmost part of the people," (Numbers 22:41) that is, the outskirts of the camp of Israel.

In accordance with the sacred significance which, as Balaam knew, attached to the number seven in the worship of Jehovah, seven altars were now built on the heights of Baal, and seven bullocks and seven rams offered upon them - a bullock and a ram on each altar. Leaving Balak and the princes of Moab by the altars, Balaam went forth in the regular heathen manner, in the hope of meeting Jehovah (Numbers 23:3), which is explained by Numbers 24:1 as meaning "to seek auguries," such as heathen soothsayers saw in certain natural appearances or portents. And there, on the top of "a bare height," God did meet Balaam, not in auguries, but by putting "a word in Balaam's mouth." As the man shared not in it otherwise than by being the outward instrument of its communication, this "word" was to him only "a parable," and is designated as such in Scripture. Never before so clearly as in presence of the powers of heathenism, assembled to contend against Israel, did Jehovah show forth His almighty power, alike in making use of an

<sup>35</sup> Joshua 13:19; Ezekiel 25:9.



instrument almost passive in His hand, and in disclosing His eternal purpose. <sup>36</sup>

#### FIRST "PARABLE" OF BALAAM

*Of course, we translate literally.*

From Aram brought me Balak,  
The king of Moab from the mountain of the east -  
Come, curse me Jacob, And come, threaten Israel!  
How shall I curse whom God doth not curse,  
And how shall I threaten whom Jehovah threatens not  
For, from the top of the rocks I see him,  
And from the hills I behold him:  
Lo, a people dwelling alone,  
And not reckoning itself among the nations (the Gentiles)!  
Who can count the dust of Jacob,  
And the number of the fourth part of Israel?  
Let me die the death of the righteous.  
And let my latter end be like his!

Two things will be noted, without entering into special criticism. First, as to the form of this parable: each thought is embodied in two sentences, with rapid, almost abrupt, transitions from one thought to the other. Secondly, the outward and inward separation of Israel (the former as symbol of the latter) is singled out as the grand characteristic of God's people - a primary truth this of the Old Testament, and, in its spiritual application, of the New Testament also. But even in its literality it has proved true in the history of Israel of old, and still applies to them, showing us that Israel's history is not yet finished; that God has not forgotten His people; and that a purpose of mercy yet awaits them, in accordance with His former dealings. Such a people Balaam could not curse. On the contrary, he could only wish that his death should be like theirs whom God's ordinances and institutions kept separate outwardly, and made

<sup>36</sup>

The prophecies of Balaam certainly go far beyond the range of the prophetic vision of that time. Could it be, because Balaam was so entirely passive, as it were transmitting, without absorbing, any of the rays of light, nor yet mingling them with the coloring in his own mind.

righteous inwardly, referring in this, of course, to Israel not as individuals, but in their totality as the people of God. In the language of a German critic, "The pious Israelite could look back with calm satisfaction, in the hour of his death, upon a life rich in proofs of the blessing, forgiving, protecting, delivering, saving mercy of God. With the same calm satisfaction would he look upon his children, and children's children, in whom he lived again, and in whom also he would still take part in the high calling of his nation, and in the ultimate fulfillment of the glorious promise which it had received from God.... And for himself, the man who died in the consciousness of possessing the mercy and love of God, knew also that he would carry them with him as an inalienable possession, a light in the darkness of Sheol. He knew that he would be 'gathered to his fathers' - a thought which must have been a very plenteous source of consolation, of hope, and of joy."

#### THE SECOND "PARABLE" OF BALAAM

It was but natural that Balak should have been equally surprised and incensed at the words of the soothsayer. The only solution he could suggest was, that a fuller view of the camp of Israel might change the disposition of the magician. "Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place, from whence thou mayest see them (viz., in their totality); only the end (utmost part) of them seest thou, but the whole of them thou seest not - and from thence curse me them." The station now selected was on the field of the watchers," on the top of Pisgah, affording not only a full view of the camp, but of the Land of Promise itself. Here Moses, not long afterwards, took his farewell prospect of the goodly heritage which the Lord had assigned to His people. The same formalities as before having been gone through, in regard to altars and sacrifices, Balaam once more returned to Balak with the following message:

A description of the view from Pisgah is given in a subsequent chapter.

Rise up, Balak, and hear,  
Hearken to me, son of Zippor!  
Not man is God that He should lie,  
Nor a son of man that He should repent!  
Hath He said, and shall He not do it,

Hath He spoken, and shall He not fulfill it?  
 Behold, to bless, I have received -  
 And He hath blessed, and I cannot turn it back!  
 He beholdeth not iniquity in Jacob,  
 And He looketh not upon distress in Israel:  
 Jehovah his God is with him,  
 And the king's jubilee in the midst of him.  
 God bringeth them out of Egypt -  
 As the unwearied strength of the buffalo is his.  
 For, no augury in Jacob, no soothsaying in Israel,  
 According to the time it is said to Jacob and to  
 Israel what God doeth.  
 Behold, the people, like a lioness it riseth,  
 And like a lion it raiseth itself up -  
 He shall not lie down, till he has eaten the prey,  
 And drink the blood of the slain.

The meaning of this second "parable" needs no special explanation. Only it will be noticed, that the progress of thought is successively marked by four lines - the last two always expressing the ground, or showing the foundation of the two first. The center couplet is the most important. It marks forever, that the Covenant-Presence of God in Israel, or, as we should now express it, that the grace of God, is the ultimate cause of the forgiveness of sins, and that the happy realization of Jehovah as the King is the ground of joy. Whenever and wherever that Presence is wanting only unforgiven sin is beheld; wherever that shout is not heard only misery is felt.

### THE THIRD "PARABLE" OF BALAAM

In his despair Balak now proposed to try the issue from yet a third locality. This time a ridge somewhat farther north was selected - "the top of Peor that looketh toward Jeshimon." A third time seven altars were built and sevenfold sacrifices offered. But there was a marked difference in the present instance. Balaam went no more "as at other times to seek for auguries" (Numbers 24:1). Nor did Jehovah now, as formerly (23:5, 16), "put a word in his mouth." But "the Spirit of God came upon him" (24:2), in the same manner as afterwards upon Saul (1 Samuel 19:23) - he was in the ecstatic state, powerless and almost

unconscious, or, as Balaam himself describes it, with his outward eyes shut (ver. 3), and "falling," as if struck down, while seeing "the vision of the Almighty," and "having his (inner) eyes opened" (ver. 4).

Saith Balaam, the son of Beor,  
 And saith the man with closed eye,  
 The Targum Onkelos, however, renders, "the man who saw clearly."

Saith he, hearing the words of God,  
 Beholding the vision of the Almighty: he  
 beholdeth -

falling down - and with open eyes!

How good are thy tabernacles, Jacob,

Thy dwellings, O Israel -

Like (watered) valleys they stretch, like gardens  
 by a river,

Like aloes Jehovah planted, like cedars by the  
 waters.

Flow waters from his twin buckets - and his seed  
 by many waters,

Higher than Agag shall be his king - and his  
 kingdom be exalted.

God brings him from Egypt - his the unwearied  
 strength of the buffalo -

He shall eat the nations (Gentiles) his enemies -  
 and their bones

shall he gnaw - and his arrows shall he split.

He coucheth, lieth down like a lion and like a  
 lioness

- who shall rouse him?

Blessed he that blesseth thee, and cursed he that  
 curseth thee!

We can scarcely wonder that the bitter disappointment of Balak should now have broken forth in angry reproaches. But Balaam had not yet finished his task. Before leaving the king he must deliver another part of the message, which he had

already received from Jehovah, but not yet spoken.  
<sup>37</sup>

"Come, I will advise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days" (24:14).

#### PROPHETIC MESSAGE THROUGH BALAAM IN FOUR "PARABLES"

First "parable," descriptive first of the "latter days," and then referring to

Moab, as the representative of heathenism:

Saith Balaam, the son of Beor,

and saith the man with closed eye,

Saith he, hearing the words of God, and knowing the knowledge of the Most High,

Beholding the vision of the Almighty: he beholdeth - falling down - and with open eyes:

I behold Him, but not now - I descry Him, but not nigh!

Cometh <sup>38</sup> a Star from Jacob, and rises a Sceptre from Israel,

And dasheth the two sides of Moab, and overthroweth the sons of tumult. <sup>39</sup>

And Edom shall be a possession, and a possession shall be Seir <sup>40</sup> - his enemies -

And Israel is doing mighty things!

And shall come from Jacob (a ruler)

And shall destroy what remaineth out of the cities.

Second "parable" against Amalek - as the representative of heathenism in its first contest against Israel:

<sup>37</sup> This we gather from the addition of the words, "knowing the knowledge of the Most High" (24:16) besides, "beholding the vision of the Almighty" (ver. 4).

<sup>38</sup> Literally, makes its way.

<sup>39</sup> Among all nations "the star" has been associated with the future glory of great kings. The application of it to the Messiah is not only constant in Scripture, but was universally acknowledged by the ancient Jews. Both the Targum Onkelos and that of Jonathan apply it in this manner. "The two sides of Moab," i.e., from end to end of the land, "The sons of tumult," i.e., the rebellious nations.

<sup>40</sup> Edom is the people; Seir the country.

And he beheld Amalek, and he took up his parable, and said:

First of the Gentiles Amalek - and his latter end even unto destruction.

Third "parable" in favor of the Kenites as the friends and allies of Israel:

And he beheld the Kenites, and he took up his parable, and said:

Durable thy dwelling-place, and placed on the rock thy nest.

For shall Kajin be for destruction,

Until Assbur shall lead thee away?

Fourth "parable" concerning the Assyrian empire, and the kingdoms of this world, or prophecy of "the end," appropriately beginning with a "woe:"

And he took up his parable, and said: <sup>41</sup>

Woe! who shall live when God putteth this? <sup>42</sup>

And ships from the side of Chittim - and afflict Asshur, and

afflict Eber -

And he also unto destruction!

This latter may, indeed, be characterized as the most wonderful of prophecies. More than a thousand years before the event, not only the rising of the great world-empire of the West is here predicted, with its conquest of Asshur and Eber (i.e., of the descendants of Eber) (Genesis 10:21), but far beyond this the final destruction of that world-empire is foretold! In fact, we have here a series of prophecies, commencing with the appearance of the Messiah and closing with the destruction of Anti-Christ. To this there is no parallel in Scripture, except in the visions of Daniel. No ingenuity of hostile criticism can take from, or explain away the import of this marvelous prediction.

And now the two parted - the king to go to his people, the soothsayer, as we gather from the

<sup>41</sup> Of course, the Assyrian empire was as yet in the far future, and could not therefore be "beheld" like Moab, Amalek, and the Kenites.

<sup>42</sup> Who shall be able to abide when God doeth all this?

sequel, to the tents of Midian. But we meet Balaam only too soon again. One who had entered on such a course could not stop short of the terrible end. He had sought to turn away Jehovah from His people, and failed. He would now endeavor to turn the people from Jehovah. If he succeeded in this, the consequences to Israel would be such as Balak had desired to obtain. By his advice (Numbers 31:16; Revelation 2:14) the children of Israel were seduced into idolatry and all the vile abominations connected with it.<sup>43</sup>

In the judgment which ensued, not fewer than 4,000 Israelites perished, till the zeal of Phinehas stayed the plague, when in his representative capacity he showed that Israel, as a nation, abhorred idolatry and the sins connected with it, as the greatest crime against Jehovah. But on "the evil men and seducers" speedy judgment came. By God's command the children of Israel were avenged of the Midianites. In the universal slaughter of Midian, Balaam also perished. The figure of Balaam stands out alone in the history of the Old Testament. The only counterpart to it is that of Judas, the traitor. Balaam represented the opposition of heathenism; Judas that of Judaism. Both went some length in following the truth; Balaam honestly acknowledged the God of Israel, and followed His directions: Judas owned the Messianic appearance in Jesus, and joined His disciples. But in the crisis of their inner history, when that came which, in one form or another, must be to everyone the decisive question - each failed. Both had stood at the meeting and parting of the two ways, and both chose that course which rapidly ended in their destruction. Balaam had expected the service of Jehovah to be quite other from what he found it; and, trying to make it such as he imagined and wished, he not only failed, but stumbled, fell, and was broken. Judas, also, if we may be allowed the suggestion, had expected the Messiah to be quite other than he found Him; disappointment, perhaps failure in the attempt to induce Him to alter His course, and an increasingly widening gulf of distance between them, drove him, step by step, to ruin. Even the

besetting sins of Balaam and of Judas - covetousness and ambition - are the same. And as, when Balaam failed in turning Jehovah from Israel, he sought - only too successfully - to turn Israel from the Lord; so when Judas could not turn the Christ from His purpose towards His people, he also succeeded in turning Israel, as a nation, from their King. In both instances, also, for a moment a light more bright than before was cast upon the scene. In the case of Balaam we have the remarkable prophetic utterances, reaching far beyond the ordinary range of prophetic vision; at the betrayal of Judas, we hear the prophetic saying of the High-priest going far beyond the knowledge of the time, that Jesus should die, not only for His own people, but for a ruined world. And, lastly, in their terrible end, they each present to us most solemn warning of the danger of missing the right answer to the great question - that of absolute and implicit submission of mind, heart, and life to the revealed Covenant-Will of God.

### **III\_03 The Second Census Of Israel - The "Daughters Of Zelophehad" - Appointment Of Moses' Successor - Sacrificial Ordinances - The War Against Midian - Allocation Of Territory East Of The Jordan - Levitical And Cities Of Refuge**

#### **Numbers 26 to 36**

Before describing the closing scene of Moses' life, we may here conveniently group together brief notices of the events intervening between the judgment of "the plague" on account of Israel's sin (Numbers 25) and the last discourses of Moses recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy.

1. A second census of Israel was taken by Divine direction (Numbers 26). The arrangements for it were in all probability the same as those at the first census, thirty-eight years before (Numbers 1). The "plague" had swept away any who might yet have remained of the old doomed generation, which had come out of Egypt. At any rate, none such were now left (Numbers 26:64). This may have been the reason for taking a new census. But its main object was in view of the approaching apportionment of the land which Israel was so soon to possess. Accordingly, the census was not taken as before (Numbers 1), according to the number of individuals in each tribe, but according to

<sup>43</sup> The service of Baal-Peor represents the vilest form of idolatry.

"families." This corresponded in the main with the names of the grandsons and great-grandsons of Jacob, enumerated in Genesis 46. In reference to the future division of the land, it was arranged that the extent of the "inheritance" allotted to each tribe should correspond to its numbers (Numbers 26:52-54). But the exact locality assigned to each was to be determined "by lot" (vers. 55, 56), so that each tribe might feel that it had received its "possession" directly from the Lord Himself.

The proposed division of the land brought up a special question of considerable importance to Israel. It appears that one Zelophehad, of the tribe of Manasseh, and of the family of Gilead, had died - not in any special judgment, but along with the generation that perished in the wilderness. Having left no sons, his daughters were anxious to obtain a "possession," lest their father's name should be "done away from among his family" (Numbers 27). By Divine direction, which Moses had sought, their request was granted,<sup>44</sup> and it became "a statute of judgment" in Israel - a juridical statute - that daughters, or in their default - the nearest kinsman, should enter upon the inheritance of those who died without leaving sons.

In all such cases, of course the children of those who obtained the possession would have to be incorporated, not with the tribe to which they originally belonged, but with that in which their "inheritance" lay. Thus the "name" of a man would not "be done away from among his family." Nor was this "statute" recorded merely on account of its national bearing, but for higher reasons. For this desire to preserve a name in a family in Israel sprang not merely from feelings natural in such circumstances, but was connected with the hope of the coming Messiah. Till He appeared, each family would fain have preserved its identity. Several instances of such changes from one tribe to another, through maternal inheritance, are recorded in Scripture (comp. 1 Chronicles 2:34, 35; Numbers 32:41, and Deuteronomy 3:14, 15, and 1 Chronicles 2:21-23; and notably, even in the

case of priests, Ezra 2:61, 62, and Nehem. 7:63 and 64).

2. God intimated once more to Moses his impending death, before actual entrance into the Land of Promise (Numbers 27:12-14). In so doing, mention of the sin which had caused this judgment was repeated, to show God's holiness and justice, even in the case of His most approved servants. On the other hand, this second reminder also manifested the faithfulness of the Lord, Who would have his servant, as it were, set his house in order, that he might meet death, not at unawares, but with full consciousness of what was before him. It is touching to see how meekly Moses received the sentence. Faithful to the end in his stewardship over God's house, his chief concern was, that God would appoint a suitable successor, so "that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd" (vers. 15-17). To this office Joshua, who had the needful spiritual qualifications, was now set apart by the laying on of Moses' hands, in presence of Eleazar the priest and of the congregation. Yet only part of Moses' "honor" - so much as was needful to ensure the obedience of Israel - was put upon Joshua, while his public movements were to be directed by "the judgment of the Urim" and Thummim. Thus did God not only vindicate the honor of His servant Moses, but also show that the office which Moses had filled was, in its nature, unique, being typical of that committed in all its fullness to the Great Head of the Church.

3. Now that the people were about to take possession of the land, the sacrificial ordinances were once more enjoined, and with full details. The daily morning and evening sacrifice had already been previously instituted in connection with the altar of burnt-offering (Exodus 29:38-42). To this daily consecration of Israel were now added the special sacrifices of the Sabbath - symbolical of a deeper and more special dedication on God's own day. The Sabbatic and the other festive sacrifices were always brought in addition to the daily offering. Again, the commencement of every month was marked by a special sacrifice, with the addition of a sin-offering, while the blast of the priests' trumpets was intended, as it were, to bring Israel's prayers

<sup>44</sup> To prevent the possibility of the possession of Zelophehad passing, in the year of Jubilee, away from the tribe to which Zelophehad had belonged, it was determined (Numbers 36) that his daughters should not marry out of their father's tribe; and this was afterwards made a general law.



and services in remembrance before the Lord. If the beginning of each month was thus significantly consecrated, the feast of unleavened bread (from the 15th to the 21st of Abib), which made that month the beginning of the year, was marked by the repetition on each of its seven days of the sacrifices which were prescribed forever "new moon." The Paschal feast (on the 14th of Abib) had no general congregational sacrifice, but only that of the lamb for the Paschal supper in each household. Lastly, the sacrifices for the feast of weeks were the same as those for the feast of unleavened bread, with the addition of the two "wave loaves" and their accompanying sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus 23:7-21.<sup>45</sup> This concluded the first festive cycle in the year.

The second cycle of feasts took place in the seventh or sacred month - seven being the sacred number, and that of the covenant. It began with new moon's day when, besides the daily, and the ordinary new moon's offerings, special festive sacrifices were brought (Numbers 29:1-6). Then on the 10th of that month was the "Day of Atonement," while on the 15th commenced the feast of tabernacles, which lasted seven days, and was followed by an octave. All these feasts had their appropriate sacrifices.

The laws as to sacrifices appropriately close with directions about "vows" (Numbers 30). In all the ordinances connected with the sacred seasons, the attentive reader will mark the symbolical significance attaching to the number seven - alike in the feasts themselves, in their number, their sacrifices, and in that of the days appointed for holy convocation. Indeed, the whole arrangement of time was ordered on the same principle, ascending from the Sabbath of days, to the Sabbath of weeks, of months, of years, and finally to the Sabbath of Sabbatic years, which was the year of Jubilee. And thus all time pointed forward

<sup>45</sup> That the sacrifices prescribed in Leviticus 23:17-21 were not the same as those in Numbers 28:26-31, is not only established by the unanimous testimony of Jewish tradition, but appears from a comparison of the differences between the sacrifices ordained in these two passages. Thus the feast of weeks or "of first-fruits" had threefold sacrifices - the ordinary daily, the ordinary festive, and the special festive sacrifice.

and upward to the "Sabbatism," or sacred rest, that remaineth for "the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9).

4. All that has hitherto been described occurred before the expedition against Midian, by which Israel was "avenged" for the great sin into which they had by treachery been seduced. That expedition which was accompanied by Phinehas, whose zeal had formerly stayed the plague (Numbers 25:7, 8), was not only completely successful, but executed all the Divine directions given. The Midianites seem to have been taken by surprise, and made no resistance. The five kings of Midian, or rather the five chieftains of their various tribes (comp. Numbers 25:15), all of whom seem to have been tributaries of Sihon (comp. Joshua 13:21), were killed, as well as the great bulk of the population, and "their cities," and "tent-villages" (erroneously rendered in the Authorized Version "goodly castles") "burnt with fire." Besides a large number of prisoners, immense booty was taken. To show their gratitude for the marvelous preservation of the people, who had probably surprised their enemies in one of their wild licentious orgies, the princes offered as an "oblation" to the sanctuary all the golden ornaments taken from the Midianites. The value of these amounted, according to the present standard of money, to considerably upwards of 25,000l.

The destruction of the power of Midian, who might have harassed them from the east, secured to Israel the quiet possession of the district east of Jordan, which their arms had already conquered. All along, from the river Arnon in the south, which divided Israel from Moab, to the river Jabbok and far beyond it, the land of Gilead<sup>46</sup> and of Bashan, their borders were safe from hostile attacks.

The accounts of travelers are unanimous in describing that district as specially suited for pastoral purposes. We read of magnificent park like scenery, of wide upland pastures, and rich

<sup>46</sup> Numbers 32:1 speaks of "the Land of Jazer and of Gilead." "Jazer," or "Jaazer" (Numbers 21:32) was a town on the way between Heshbon in the south and Bashan in the north. It gave its name to the district, and was probably specially mentioned by the Reubenites as perhaps the township east of Jordan nearest to the camp of Israel. It is supposed to be the modern Seir - almost in a line with Jericho, east of the Jordan.

forests, which everywhere gladden the eye. No wonder that those of the tribes which had all along preserved their nomadic habits, and whose flocks and herds constituted their main possessions and their wealth, should wish to settle in those plains and mountains. To them they were in very truth the land of promise, suited to their special wants, and offering the very riches which they desired. The other side Jordan had little attraction for them; and its possession would have been the opposite of advantageous to a strictly pastoral people. Accordingly, "the children of Gad," and "the children of Reuben" requested of Moses:

"Let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan" (Numbers 32:5).

If this proposal did not actually imply that those tribes intended henceforth quietly to settle down, leaving their brethren to fight alone for the conquest of Palestine proper, it was at least open to such interpretation. Moses seems to have understood it in that sense. But, if such had been their purpose, they would not only have separated themselves from the Lord's work and leading, but, by discouraging their brethren, have re-enacted, only on a much larger scale, the sin of those unbelieving spies who, thirty-eight years before, had brought such heavy judgment upon Israel. And the words of Moses prevailed. Whether from the first their real intentions had been right, or the warning of Moses had influenced them for good, they now solemnly undertook to accompany their brethren across Jordan, and to stand by them till they also had entered on their possession. Until then they would only restore the "folds" <sup>47</sup> for their sheep, and rebuild the destroyed cities, <sup>48</sup> to afford safe dwelling-places for their wives and children, and, of course, for such of their number as were either left behind for defense, or incapable of going forth to war.

<sup>47</sup> These are not "Hazzeroth," but rubble walls for sheep, made of loose stones.

<sup>48</sup> These cities were rebuilt before the apportionment of the country among these two and a half tribes. This appears from the fact that, for example, Dibon and, Aroer were built by "the children of Gad" (Numbers 32:34, 35), but afterwards allocated to Reuben (Joshua 13:16, 17).

On this express promise, their request was granted, and the ancient kingdoms of Sihon and of Og were provisionally assigned to Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, which latter had made special conquests in Gilead (Numbers 32:39). But the actual division of the district among these tribes was left over for the period when the whole country should be allocated among the children of Israel (Joshua 13).

5. The arrangements preparatory to possession of the land appropriately concluded with two series of ordinances. The first of these (Numbers 33:50-34:56) directed the extermination of the Canaanites and of all traces of their idolatry, re-joining, at the same time, the partition of the now purified land, by lot, among the tribes of Israel (Numbers 33:50-56).

Next, the boundary lines of Palestine were indicated, and the persons named who were to superintend the partition of the country (Numbers 34). This duty was entrusted to Eleazar the high-priest, and to Joshua, along with ten representative "priests", one from each of the ten tribes, Reuben and Gad having already received their portion on the other side Jordan. The second series of ordinances now enacted (Numbers 35, 36) was, if not of greater importance, yet of even deeper symbolical meaning. According to the curse that had been pronounced upon Levi, that tribe was destined to be "divided in Jacob" (Genesis 49:7). But, in the goodness of God, this was now converted into a blessing alike to Levi and to all Israel. The Levites, the special property and election of the Lord, were to be scattered among all the other tribes, to recall by their presence everywhere the great truths which they symbolized, and to keep alive among the people the knowledge and service of the Lord. On the other hand, they were not to be quite isolated, but gathered together into cities, so that by fellowship and intercourse they might support and strengthen one another. For this purpose forty-eight cities were now assigned to the Levites - of course not exclusive of any other inhabitants, but "to dwell in," that is, they were to have as many houses in them as were required for their accommodation. Along with these houses certain "suburbs," also, or "commons" for their herds and flocks, were to be

assigned them - covering in extent on each side a distance of 1000 cubits (1500 feet) round about their cities (Numbers 35:4). Besides, around this inner, another outer circle of 2000 cubits was to be drawn in every direction. These were to be the fields and vineyards of the Levites <sup>49</sup> (ver. 5).

The number of these cities in each tribe varied according to the size of its territory. Thus Judah and Simeon had to furnish nine cities, Naphtali only three, and each of the other tribes four (Joshua 21). Lastly, the thirteen Levitical cities in the territories of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin were specially assigned to the priests, the descendants of the house of Aaron, while six of the Levitical cities - three east and three west of the Jordan - were set apart as "cities of refuge," for the unintentional manslayer. It is interesting to notice, that even the number of the Levitical cities was significant. They amounted in all to forty-eight, which is a multiple of four, the symbolical number of the kingdom of God in the world, and of twelve, the number of the tribes of Israel.

In regard to the "cities of refuge," for the protection of the unintending manslayer, it must not be imagined that the simple plea of unintentional homicide afforded safety. The law, indeed, provided that the country both east and west of the Jordan should be divided in three parts - each with its "city of refuge," the roads to which were always to be kept in good repair. But, according to the sacred text (Numbers 35:25, comp. Joshua 20:4), a homicide would, on arriving at the gates of a city of refuge, first have to plead his case before the elders of that city, when, if it approved itself to their minds, they would afford, him provisional protection. If, however, afterwards, the "avenger of blood" claimed his extradition, the accused person would be sent back under proper protection to his own city, where the whole case would be thoroughly investigated. If the homicide was then proved to have been unintentional, the accused would be restored to the "city of refuge," and enjoy its protection, till the

death of the high priest set him free to return to his own city.

As for the duty of "avenging blood," its principle is deeply rooted in the Old Testament, and traced up to the relation in which God stands to our world. For, the blood of man, who is God's image, when shed upon earth, which is God's property, "crieth" unto God (Genesis 4:10) - claims payment like an unredeemed debt. Hence the expression "avenger of blood," which should be literally rendered "redeemer of blood." On the other hand, the symbolical meaning of the cities of refuge will readily be understood. There - in the place of God's merciful provision - the manslayer was to find a refuge, sheltered, as it were, under the wings of the grace of God, till the complete remission of the punishment at the death of the high priest - the latter symbolically pointing forward to the death of Him Whom God has anointed our great High Priest, and Who "by His one oblation of Himself once offered," hath made "a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction" for the sins of the world.

### III\_04 Death And Burial Of Moses

#### Deuteronomy 3:23-29; Numbers 27:15-23; Deuteronomy 34

ALL was now ready, and Israel about to cross the Jordan and take possession of the Promised Land! It was only natural - one of those traits in the history of the great heroes of the Bible, so peculiarly precious, as showing in their weakness their kinship to our feelings - that Moses should have longed to share in what was before Israel. Looking back the long vista of these one hundred and twenty years - first of life and trial in Egypt, then of loneliness and patient faith while feeding the flocks of Jethro, and, lastly, of labor and weariness in the wilderness, it would indeed have been strange, had he not wished now to have part in the conquest and rest of the goodly land. He had believed in it; he had preached it; he had prayed for it; he had labored, borne, fought for it. And now within reach and view of it must he lay himself down to die?

Scripture records (Deuteronomy 3:23-26), with touching simplicity, what passed between Moses and his Heavenly Father. "And I entreated grace

<sup>49</sup> Very varied interpretations of these two difficult verses have been proposed. That adopted in the text is in accordance with Jewish tradition, and the most simple, while it meets all the requirements of the text.

from the Lord at that time, saying: Lord Jehovah, Thou hast begun to show Thy servant Thy greatness and Thy strong hand. For what God is there in heaven or in the earth which doeth like Thy doings and like Thy might? Oh, that I might now go over and see the good land which is on the other side Jordan, this goodly mountain and the Lebanon! And Jehovah was wroth with me on account of you, and hearkened not unto me. And God said to me: Let it now suffice thee - continue not to speak to Me any more on this matter."

The deep feelings of Moses had scarcely bodied themselves in the language of prayer. Rather had it been the pouring forth of his inmost desires before his Father in heaven - a precious privilege which His children possess at all times. But even so Moses had in this also, though but "as a steward" and "afar off," to follow Him whose great type he was, and to learn the peaceful rest of this experience, after a contest of thought and wish: "Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done." And it was the good will of God that Moses should lay himself down to rest without entering the land. Although it came in punishment of Israel's and of Moses' sin at the waters of Meribah, yet it was also better that it should be so - better for Moses himself. For on the top of Pisgah God prepared something better for Moses than even entrance into the land of earthly promise.

And now calmly, as a father setteth his house in order, did Moses prepare for his departure. During his life all his thoughts had been for Israel; and he was faithful even unto the death. His last care also had been for the people whom he had loved, and for the work to which he had been devoted - that Jehovah would provide for His congregation "a shepherd" "who may lead them out and bring them in" (Numbers 27:16, 17). Little else was left to be done. In a series of discourses, Moses repeated, and more fully re-stated, to Israel the laws and ordinances of God their King. His last record was "a song" of the mercy and truth of God (Deuteronomy 32); his last words a blessing upon Israel (Deuteronomy 33). Then, amid the respectful silence of a mourning people, he set out alone upon his last pilgrim-journey. All the way up to the highest top of Pisgah the eyes of the people must have followed him. They could watch

him as he stood there in the sunset, taking his full view of the land - there to see for himself how true and faithful Jehovah had been. Still could they descry his figure, as, in the shadows of even, it moved towards a valley apart. After that no mortal eye ever beheld him, till, with Elijah, he stood on the mount of transfiguration. Then indeed was the longing wish of Moses, uttered many, many centuries before, fulfilled far beyond his thinking or hoping at the time. He did stand on "the goodly mountain" within the Land of Promise, worshipping, and giving testimony to Him in "Whom all the promises are yea and amen." It was a worthy crowning this of such a life. Not the faithful steward of Abraham, Eliezer of Damascus, when he brought to his master's son the God-given bride, could with such joy see the end of his faithful stewardship when the heir entered on his possession, as this "steward over God's house," when on that mountain he did homage to "the Son in His own house."

But to Israel down in the valley had Moses never so preached of the truth and faithfulness of Jehovah, and of His goodness and support to His people, as from the top of Pisgah. There was a strange symbolical aptness even in the ascent of the mount, 4,500 feet up, which is "rapid" but "not rugged."

Standing on the highest crest, the prospect would, indeed, seem almost unbounded. Eastwards, stretching into Arabia, rolls a boundless plain - one waving ocean of corn and grass. As the eye turns southwards, it ranges over the land of Moab, till it rests on the sharp outlines of Mounts Hor and Seir, and the rosy granite peaks of Arabia. To the west the land descends, terrace by terrace, to the Dead Sea, the western outline of which can be traced in its full extent. Deep below lies that sea, "like a long strip of molten metal, with the sun mirrored on its surface, waving and undulating in its further edge, unseen in its eastern limits, as though poured from some deep cavern beneath." Beyond it would appear the ridge of Hebron, and then as the eye traveled northwards, successively the sites of Bethlehem and of Jerusalem. The holy city itself would be within range of view - Mount Moriah, the Mount of Olives; on the one side of it the gap in the hills leading to Jericho, while on the

other side, the rounded heights of Benjamin would be clearly visible. Turning northwards, the eye follows the winding course of Jordan from Jericho, the city of palm-trees, up the stream. Looking across it, it rests on the rounded top of Mount Gerizim, beyond which the plain of Esdraelon opens, and the shoulder of Carmel appears. That blue haze in the distance is the line of "the utmost sea." Still farther northwards rise the outlines of Tabor, Gilboa, the top of snow-clad Hermon, and the highest range of Lebanon. In front are the dark forests of Ajalon, Mount Gilead, then the land of Bashan and Bozrah.

"And Jehovah shewed Moses all the land of Gilead, unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, unto the utmost sea, and the Negeb, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm-trees, unto Zoar" (Deuteronomy 34:1-3).

Such was the prospect which, from that mountain-top, spread before Moses. And when he had satiated his eyes upon it, he descended into that valley apart to lay him down to rest. Into the mysterious silence of that death and burial at the hands of Jehovah we dare not penetrate. Jewish tradition, rendering the expression (Deuteronomy 34:5) literally, has it that "Moses the servant of Jehovah died there... at the mouth of Jehovah," or, as they put it, by the kiss of the Lord. But from the brief saying of Scripture (Jude 9) may we not infer that although Moses also received in death the wages of sin, yet his body passed not through corruption, however much "the devil," contending as for his lawful prey, "disputed" for its possession, but was raised up to be with Elijah the first to welcome the Lord in His glory? For "men bury a body that it may pass into corruption. If Jehovah, therefore, would not suffer the body of Moses to be buried by men, it is but natural to seek for the reason in the fact that He did not intend to leave him to corruption."

But "there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom Jehovah knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders, which Jehovah sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which

Moses showed in the sight of all Israel" (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).

"and Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a Son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Hebrews 3:5, 6).

### **III\_05 The Charge To Joshua - Dispatch Of The Two Spies To Jericho – Rahab**

#### **Joshua 1 and 2**

A WIDE, rich plain at the foot of the mountains of Moab, carpeted with wild flowers springing in luxuriant beauty, watered by many rivulets and rills, here and there covered by acacia trees, where birds of brightest plumage carol, and beyond, to the south, by the banks of streams, where scented oleanders rise to a height of twenty-five feet, their flower-laden boughs bending like those of the willow - such is Abel-Shittim, "the meadow of acacias." Beyond it are the fords of Jordan, and the western heights; in the distance southwards, the hills of Judaea, on which the purple light rests. Climate and vegetation are tropical, on the eastern even more than on the western banks of the Jordan. Many memories hallow the place. Somewhere here must Elijah have smitten the waters of Jordan, that they parted, ere the fiery chariot wrapped him from the companionship of Elisha. In this district also was the scene of John's baptism, where the Savior humbled Himself to fulfill all righteousness. And on this "meadow of acacias" did an early summer shed its softness when, about the month of March, forty years after the Exodus, the camp of Israel kept thirty days' solemn mourning for Moses (Deuteronomy 34:8). Behind them rose that mountain-top, from which "that saint of God" had seen his last of Israel and of the goodly land, which they were so soon to possess; before them lay the Land of Promise which they were presently to enter.

Such a leader as Moses had been would Israel never more see; nor yet one with whom God had so spoken, "mouth to mouth," as a man with his friend. A feeling of loneliness and awe must have crept over the people and over their new leader, Joshua, like that which Elisha felt, when, alone, he



turned him back with the mantle of Elijah that came to him from heaven, to test whether now also the waters would divide at the bidding of the Lord God of Elijah. And the faithful Covenant-God was with Joshua, as he waited, not unbelievably, but expectantly, in that mourning camp of Abel-Shittim, for a fresh message from God. Though he had been previously designated by God, and set apart to the leadership, it was well he should so wait, not only for his own sake, but also "that the people might afterwards not hesitate gladly to follow his leadership, who had not moved a foot without the leading of God."<sup>50</sup> And in due time the longed-for direction came: not in doubtful language, but renewing alike the commission of Joshua and the promises to Israel. Far as the eye could reach, to the heights of Anti-Lebanon in the extreme distance, to the shores of the Great Sea, to the Euphrates in the East - all was theirs, and not a foeman should withstand them, for God would "not fail nor forsake" their leader. Only two things were requisite: that, in his loving obedience, the word and commands of God should be precious to Joshua; and that in strong faith he should be "very courageous." This latter command was twice repeated, as it were to indicate alike the inward courage of faith and the outward courage of deed.

That this call had found a response in the hearts not only of Joshua, but also of the people, appears from the answer of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, when reminded of their obligation to share in the impending warfare of their brethren. While professing their readiness to acknowledge in all things the authority of Joshua, they also expressly made the latter conditional on the continued direction of Jehovah, and re-echoed the Divine admonition to be "strong and of a good courage." So much does success in all we undertake depend on the assurance of faith!

"For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord" (James 1:6, 7).

Thus directed and encouraged, Joshua gave orders that the people should provide themselves with the necessary victuals to begin, if occasion should

<sup>50</sup> Calvin.

offer, their forward march on the third day. In point of fact, however, it was at least five days before that movement could be made. For Joshua had deemed it prudent to adopt proper preparatory measures, although, or rather just because he was assured of Divine help, and trusted in it. Accordingly he had sent, unknown to the people,<sup>51</sup> two spies "to view the land and Jericho."<sup>52</sup> The reason of this secrecy lay probably both in the nature of their errand, and in the sad remembrance of the discouragement which evil report by the spies had formerly wrought among the people (Numbers 14:1). As the two spies stealthily crept up the eight miles of country from the western bank of the Jordan to "the city of palm trees," they must have been struck with the extraordinary "beauty and luxuriance of the district. Even now there is a bright green oasis of several miles square which marks the more rich and populous groves of Jericho."

Its vegetation is most rich and rare; almost every tree is tenanted by the bulbul or Palestinian nightingale, with the "hopping thrush," "the gorgeous Indian blue kingfisher, the Egyptian turtle-dove, and other singing birds of Indian or Abyssinian affinity." "On the plain above are the desert larks and chats, while half an hour's walk takes us to the Mount of Temptation, the home of the griffon, where beautifully plumed partridges, rock-swallows, rock-doves, and other birds abound. But, beyond all others, Jericho is the home of the lovely sun-bird,.... resplendent with all the colors of the humming-bird" - its back brilliant green, its throat blue, and its breast purple, "with a tuft of rich red, orange, and yellow feathers at each shoulder." The little streams - which Elisha healed from its after curse - swarms with fish, while climate and prospect are equally delicious in that early summer-like spring, when the spies visited it. And what the wealth and beauty of this plain must have been when it was crowded with feathery palms, and scented balsam

<sup>51</sup> In Joshua 2:1, the accentuation connects the words "secretly" and "saying," which are separated by commas in our Authorized Version showing that the commission was intrusted to them secretly.

<sup>52</sup> The meaning really is "especially Jericho," which fortress was the key to the western bank of Jordan.

gardens, we learn from the descriptions of Josephus (Ant. xv. 4, 2). This paradise of Canaan was guarded by the fortress of Jericho - one of the strongest in the whole land.<sup>53</sup> Behind its walls and battlements immense wealth was stored, partly natural and partly the result of civilization and luxury. This appears even from the character and value of the spoil which one individual - Achan - could secrete from it (Joshua 7:21).

As the spies neared the city, the setting sun was casting his rays in richest variegated coloring on the limestone mountains which surrounded the ancient Jericho like an amphitheater, rising closest, and to the height of from 1200 to 1500 feet, in the north, where they bear the name of Quarantania, marking the traditional site of the forty days of our Lord's temptation; and thence stretching with widening sweep towards the south. Friend or ally there was none in that city, whose hospitality the two Israelites might have sought. To have resorted to a khan or inn would have been to court the publicity which most of all they wished to avoid. Under these circumstances, the choice of the house of Rahab, the harlot, was certainly the wisest for their purpose. But even so, in the excited state of the public mind, when, as we know (Joshua 2:11), the terror of Israel had fallen upon all, the arrival of two suspicious-looking strangers could not remain a secret. So soon as the gates were shut, and escape seemed impossible, the king sent to make captives of what he rightly judged to be Israelitish spies. But Rahab had anticipated him. Arriving at the same conclusion as the king, and expecting what would happen, she had "hid them" - perhaps hastily - "with the stalks of flax which she had laid in order upon the roof," after the common Eastern fashion of drying flax on the flat roofs of houses. By the adroit admission of the fact that two men, previously unknown to her, had indeed come, to which she added the false statement that they had with equal abruptness left just before the closing of the gates, she succeeded in misleading the messengers of the king. The story of Rahab sounded likely enough; she had seemingly been frank, nor was there any apparent

motive for untruthfulness on her part, but quite the opposite, as the same danger threatened all the inhabitants of Jericho. As Rahab had suggested, the messengers "pursued quickly" in the supposed wake of the Jewish emissaries, which would have been "the way to Jordan, unto the fords," by which they must return to the camp of Israel, and the gates were again shut, to make escape from Jericho impossible, if, after all, they had not quitted the city.

Thus far the device of Rahab had succeeded. So soon as night settled upon the city, she repaired to the roof, and acquainted the spies, who were ignorant of any danger, with what had taken place. At the same time she explained the motives of her conduct. They must indeed have listened with wonder, not unmingled with adoring gratitude, as she told them how they, in Canaan, had heard what Jehovah had done for Israel at the Red Sea, and that, by His help, the two powerful kings of the Amorites had been "utterly destroyed." The very language, in which Rahab described the terror that had fallen upon her countrymen, was the same as that uttered prophetically forty years before, when Moses and the children of Israel sang the new song on the other side of the Red Sea, Exodus 15:14-16 (comp. Exodus 23:27; Deuteronomy 2:25; 11:25). But the effect of this knowledge of Jehovah's great doings differed according to the state of mind of those who heard of them. In the Canaanites it called forth the energy of despair in resisting Israel, or rather Israel's God. But in Rahab's heart it awakened far other feelings. She knew that Jehovah had given to Israel the land - and far better than even this, that "Jehovah your God, He is God in heaven above and in earth beneath." Knowing God's purpose, she would shelter the spies, and so further their errand; knowing that He alone was God, she and all near and dear to her must not take part in the daring resistance of her countrymen, but seek safety by separating themselves from them and joining the people of God. And so she implored mercy for herself and her kindred in the day when Jehovah would surely give Israel the victory. Such a request could not be refused, evidenced as its genuineness had been by her "works." The two spies solemnly acceded to it, but on condition that she would prove true to the end, helping on their

<sup>53</sup> This impression is irresistibly conveyed to the mind by a comparison of the Scriptural account of Jericho with that of the other cities in Canaan.

work by still keeping their mission secret, and evidencing her faith by gathering on the day of trial all her kindred within her house. That house should be distinguished from all other dwellings in Jericho by exhibiting the same "scarlet cord," with which she let down the spies over the city wall upon which her house was built. All throughout, this story is full of deepest symbolical meaning. And in truth, one, prepared so to act, was in heart "an Israelite indeed," and her household already belonged to the "household of faith."

We are now in circumstances to appreciate the faith by which the harlot Rahab perished not with them that were disobedient, when she had "received the spies with peace," a faith which, as St. James argues, evidenced itself "by works" (James 2:25). In so doing, it is not necessary either to represent her in her former life as other than she really was, or even to extenuate her sin in returning a false answer to the king of Jericho. Nor, on the other hand, do we wish to exaggerate the spiritual condition to which she had attained.

Remembering who, and what, and among whom she had been all her life-time, her emphatic confession, that Jehovah, the God of Israel, "He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath;" her unwavering faith in the truth of His promises, which moved her to self-denying action at such danger and sacrifice, and supported her in it; her separation from her countrymen; her conduct towards the spies at the risk of her life - all show

her to have had that faith which "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen;" not a "dead faith," "without works," but one which "wrought with her works, and by works was made perfect." And He Who "giveth more grace" to them who wisely use what they have, marvelously owned and blessed this "first-fruits" from among the Gentiles. Her history, which, in all its circumstances, bears a remarkable analogy to that of the woman of Samaria (John 4), is recorded for the instruction of the Church. And, as in the case of the Hebrew midwives who had preserved Israel (Exodus 1:21), God also "made her a house." She became the wife of Salmon, a prince of the tribe of Judah, and from her sprang in direct line both David (Ruth 4:21) and David's Lord (Matthew 1:4).

But as for the two Israelitish spies, they hid themselves, according to Rahab's advice, for three days among the limestone caves and grottoes which abound in Mount Quarantania, while their pursuers vainly searched for them in the opposite direction of the fords of Jordan. When the fruitless pursuit had ceased, they made their way back to Joshua, expressing to him their conviction, as the result of their mission: "Truly Jehovah hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us."