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a *Grace Notes* course

## Old Testament History

by Alfred Edersheim

**History 504**

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*Grace Notes*

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## II\_03 The Birth and Training of Moses, in Egypt and in Midian as Preparatory to his Calling.

### Exodus 2

TO the attentive reader of Scripture it will not seem strange - only remarkable - that the very measure which Pharaoh had taken for the destruction of Israel eventually led to their deliverance. Had it not been for the command to cast the Hebrew children into the river, Moses would not have been rescued by Pharaoh's daughter, nor trained in all the wisdom of Egypt to fit him for his calling. Yet all throughout, this marvelous story pursues a natural course; that is, natural in its progress, but supernatural in its purposes and results.

A member of the tribe of Levi, and descendant of Kohath, (Exodus 6:20; Numbers 26:59) Amram by name, had married Jochebed, who belonged to the same tribe. Their union had already been blessed with two children, Miriam and Aaron,<sup>1</sup> when the murderous edict of Pharaoh was issued. The birth of their next child brought them the more sorrow and care, that the "exceeding fairness" of the child not only won their hearts, but seemed to point him out as destined of God for some special purpose.<sup>2</sup> In this struggle of affection and hope against the fear of man, they obtained the victory, as victory is always obtained, "by faith." There was no special revelation made to them, nor was there need for it. It was a simple question of faith, weighing the command of Pharaoh against the command of God and their own hopes. They resolved to trust the living God of their fathers, and to brave all seeming danger. It was in this sense that "by faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment." Longer concealment at home being impossible, the same confidence of faith now led the mother to lay the child in an ark made, as at that time the light Nile-boats used to be, of

"bulrushes," or papyrus - a strong three-cornered rush, that grew to a height of about ten or fifteen feet<sup>3</sup>

The "ark" - a term used in Scripture only here and in connection with the deliverance of Noah by an "ark" - was made tight within by "slime" - either Nile-mud or asphalt - and impenetrable to water by a coating of "pitch." Thus protected, the "ark," with its precious burden, was deposited among "the flags" in the brink, or lip of the river, just where Pharaoh's daughter was wont to bathe, though the sacred text does not expressly inform us whether or not this spot was purposely chosen. The allusion in Psalm 78:12 to the "marvelous things" done "in the field of Zoan," may perhaps guide us to the very scene of this deliverance. Zoan, as we know, was the ancient Avaris, the capital of the Shepherd kings, which the new dynasty had taken from them. The probability that it would continue the residence of the Pharaohs, the more so as it lay on the eastern boundary of Goshen, is confirmed by the circumstance that in those days, of all the ancient Egyptian residences, Avaris or Zoan alone lay on an arm of the Nile which was not infested by crocodiles, and where the princess therefore could bathe. There is a curious illustration on one of the Egyptian monuments of the scene described in the rescue of Moses. A noble lady is represented bathing in the river with four of her maidens attending upon her, just like the daughter of Pharaoh in the story of Moses. But to return - the discovery of the ark, and the weeping of the babe, as the stranger lifted him, are all true to nature. The princess is touched by the appeal of the child to her woman's feelings. She compassionates him none the less that he is one of the doomed race. To have thrown the weeping child into the river would have been inhuman. Pharaoh's daughter acted as every woman would have done in the circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The narrative implies that they were born before the murderous edict. Aaron was three years older than Moses (Exodus 7:7), while Miriam was grown up when Moses was exposed (Exodus 2:4).

<sup>2</sup> The expression in Acts 7:20 is "fair before God."

<sup>3</sup> Everything here is strictly Egyptian; even some of the terms used in the Hebrew are derived from the Egyptian. The papyrus no longer grows below Nubia, but the Egyptian monuments exhibit many such "arks" and boats made of the plant, and similarly prepared. The "flags" were a smaller species of papyrus.

<sup>4</sup> In what is commonly known as The Speaker's Commentary, an illustration of this is given from the so called

To save one Hebrew child could be no very great crime in the king's daughter. Moreover, curiously enough, we learn from the monuments, that just at that very time the royal princesses exercised special influence - in fact, that two of them were co-regents. So when, just at the opportune moment, Miriam, who all along had watched at a little distance, came forward and proposed to call some Hebrew woman to nurse the weeping child - this strange gift, bestowed as it were by the Nile, god himself on the princess,<sup>5</sup> - she readily consented. The nurse called was, of course, the child's own mother, who received her babe now as a precious charge, entrusted to her care by the daughter of him who would have compassed his destruction.

So marvelous are the ways of God. One of the old church-writers has noted that "the daughter of Pharaoh is the community of the Gentiles," thereby meaning to illustrate this great truth, which we trace throughout history, that somehow the salvation of Israel was always connected with the instrumentality of the Gentiles. It was so in the history of Joseph, and even before that; and it will continue so until at the last, through their mercy, Israel shall obtain mercy. But meanwhile a precious opportunity was afforded to those believing Hebrew parents to mold the mind of the adopted son of the princess of Egypt. The three first years of life, the common eastern time for nursing, are often, even in our northern climes, where development is so much slower, a period decisive for after life. It requires no stretch of imagination to conceive what the child Moses would learn at his mother's knee, and hear among his persecuted people. When a child so preserved and so trained found himself destined to step from his Hebrew home to the court of Pharaoh - his mind full of the promises made to the fathers, and his heart heavy with the sorrows of his brethren, - it seems almost natural that thoughts of future deliverance of his people through him should

gradually rise in his soul. Many of our deepest purposes have their root in earliest childhood, and the lessons then learnt, and the thoughts then conceived, have been steadily carried out to the end of our lives.

Yet, as in all deepest life-purpose, there was no rashness about carrying it into execution. When Jochebed brought the child back to the princess, the latter gave her adopted son the Egyptian name "Moses," which, curiously enough, appears also in several of the old Egyptian papyri, among others, as that of one of the royal princes. The word means "brought forth" or "drawn out," "because," as she said in giving the name, "I drew him out of the water."

But for the present Moses would probably not reside in the royal palace at Avails. St. Stephen tells us (Acts 7:22) that he "was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." In no country was such value attached to education, nor was it begun so early as in Egypt. No sooner was a child weaned than it was sent to school, and instructed by regularly appointed scribes. As writing was not by letters, but by hieroglyphics, which might be either pictorial representations, or symbols (a scepter for a king, etc.), or a kind of phonetic signs, and as there seem to have been hieroglyphics for single letters, for syllables, and for words, that art alone must, from its complication, have taken almost a lifetime to master it perfectly. But beyond this, education was carried to a very great length, and, in the case of those destined for the higher professions, embraced not only the various sciences, as mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, medicine, etc., but theology, philosophy, and a knowledge of the laws. There can be no doubt that, as the adopted son of the princess, Moses would receive the highest training. Scripture tells us that, in consequence, he was "mighty in his words and deeds," and we may take the statement in its simplicity, without entering upon the many Jewish and Egyptian legends which extol his wisdom, and his military and other achievements.

Thus the first forty years of Moses' life passed. Undoubtedly, had he been so minded, a career higher even than that of Joseph might have been open to him. But, before entering it, he had to

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Ritual of the Dead, the most ancient existing religious record of Egypt. It seems that one of the things which the disembodied spirit had to answer before the Lord of truth was this: "I have not afflicted any man; I have not made any man weep; I have not withheld milk from the mouth of sucklings."

<sup>5</sup> The Egyptians worshipped the Nile as a god.

decide that one great preliminary question, with whom he would cast in his lot - with Egypt or with Israel, with the world or the promises. As so often happens, the providence of God here helped him to a clear, as the grace of God to a right, decision. In the actual circumstances of Hebrew persecution it was impossible at the same time "to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" and to have part, as one of them, "with the people of God." The one meant "the pleasures of sin" and "the treasures of Egypt" - enjoyment and honors, the other implied "affliction" and "the reproach of Christ" - or suffering and that obloquy which has always attached to Christ and to His people, and at that time especially, to those who clung to the covenant of which Christ was the substance.

But "faith," which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," enabled Moses not only to "refuse" what Egypt held out, but to "choose rather the affliction," and, more than that, to "esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt," because "he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." (Hebrews 11:24-26) In this spirit "he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens." (Exodus 2:11)

But his faith, though deep and genuine, was as yet far from pure and spiritual. The ancient Egyptians were noted for the severity of their discipline, and their monuments represent the "taskmasters" armed with heavy scourges, made of tough bending wood, which they unmercifully used. The sight of such sufferings, inflicted by menials upon his brethren, would naturally rouse the utmost resentment of the son of the Princess Royal. This, together with the long-cherished resolve to espouse the cause of his brethren, and the nascent thought of becoming their deliverer, led him to slay an Egyptian, whom he saw thus maltreating "an Hebrew, one of his brethren." Still it was not an access of sudden frenzy, for "he looked this way and that way," to see "that there was no man" to observe his deed; rather was it an attempt to carry out spiritual ends by carnal means, such as in the history of Moses' ancestors had so often led to sin and suffering. He would become a deliverer before he was called to it of God; and he would accomplish it by other means than those which

God would appoint. One of the fathers has rightly compared this deed to that of Peter in cutting off the ear of the high-priest's servant; at the same time also calling attention to the fact, that the heart both of Moses and Peter resembled a field richly covered with weeds, but which by their very luxuriance gave promise of much good fruit, when the field should have been broken up and sown with good seed.

In the gracious dispensation of God, that time had now come. Before being transplanted, so to speak, Moses had to be cut down. He had to strike root downwards, before he could spring upwards. As St. Stephen puts it, "his brethren understood not how that God, by his hand, would give them deliverance" - what his appearance and conduct among them really meant; and when next he attempted to interfere in a quarrel between two Hebrews, the wrong-doer in harsh terms disowned his authority, and reproached him with his crime. It was now evident that the matter was generally known. Presently it reached the ears of Pharaoh. From what we know of Egyptian society, such an offense could not have remained unpunished, even in the son of a princess, and on the supposition that she who had originally saved Moses was still alive, after the lapse of forty years, and that the then reigning Pharaoh was her father. But, besides, Moses had not only killed an official in the discharge of his duty, he had virtually taken the part of the Hebrews, and encouraged them to rebellion. That Moses commanded such position of influence that Pharaoh could not at once order his execution, but "sought to slay him," only aggravated the matter, and made Moses the more dangerous. Open resistance to Pharaoh was of course impossible. The sole hope of safety now seemed to lie in renouncing all further connection with his people. That or flight were the only alternatives. On the other hand, flight might further provoke the wrath of the king, and it was more than doubtful whether any of the neighboring countries could, under such circumstances, afford him safe shelter. It was therefore, indeed, once more an act of "faith" when Moses "forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, for he endured" (or remained steadfast, viz., to his choice and people), "as seeing the Invisible One," that is, as one who,

instead of considering the king of Egypt, looked by faith to the King invisible. (1 Timothy 1:17)

Like Jacob of old, and Joseph under similar circumstances, Moses must now go into a strange land. All that Egypt could teach him, he had acquired. What he still needed could only be learned in loneliness, humiliation, and suffering. Two things would become manifest in the course of his history. That which, in his own view, was to have freed his people from their misery, had only brought misery to himself. On the other hand, that which seemed to remove him from his special calling, would prepare the way for its final attainment. And so it often happens to us in the most important events of our lives, that thus we may learn the lessons of faith and implicit self-surrender and that God alone may have the glory.

Disowned by his people, and pursued by the king, the gracious Providence of God prepared a shelter and home for the fugitive. Along the eastern shore of the Red Sea the Midianites, descended from Abraham through Keturah, (Genesis 25:2-4) had their settlements, whence, as nomads, they wandered, on one side to the southern point of the peninsula of Sinai, and on the other, northward, as far as the territory of Moab. Among the Midianites it happened to Moses, as of old to Jacob on his flight. At the "well" he was able to protect the daughters of Reuel, "the priest of Midian," against the violence of the shepherds, who drove away their flocks.<sup>6</sup> Invited in consequence to the house of Reuel, he continued there, and eventually married Zipporah, the daughter of the priest. This, and the birth of his two sons, to which we shall presently refer, is absolutely all that Moses himself records of his forty years' stay in Midian.

But we are in circumstances to infer some other and important details. The father-in-law of Moses seems to have worshipped the God of Abraham, as even his name implies: Reuel, the "friend of El" the latter the designation which the patriarchs gave to God, as El Shaddai, "God Almighty." (Exodus

6:3) This is further borne out by his after-conduct. (Exodus 18) Reuel is also called Jethro and Jether, (Exodus 3:1; 4:18) which means "excellency," and was probably his official title as chief priest of the tribe, the same as the Imam of the modern Arabs, the term having a kindred meaning.<sup>7</sup>

But the life of Moses in the house of Reuel must have been one of humiliation and loneliness. From her after-conduct (Exodus 4:25) we infer that Zipporah was a woman of violent, imperious temper, who had but little sympathy with the religious convictions of her husband. When she first met him as "an Egyptian," his bravery may have won her heart. But further knowledge of the deepest aims of his life might lead her to regard him as a gloomy fanatic, who busied his mind with visionary schemes. So little indeed does she seem to have had in common with her husband that, at the most trying and noble period of his life, when on his mission to Pharaoh, he had actually to send her away. (Exodus 18:2, 3) Nor could there have been much confidence between Moses and his father-in-law. His very subordinate position in the family of Jethro (3:1); the fact of his reticence in regard to the exact vision vouchsafed him of God (4:18); and the humble manner in which Moses was sent back into Egypt (ver. 20), all give a saddening view of the mutual relations. What, however, all this time were the deepest feelings and experiences of his heart, found expression in the names which he gave to his two sons. The elder he named Gershom (expulsion, banishment), "for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land" (Exodus 2:22) the second he called Eliezer, "my God is help" (18:4). Banished to a strange land, far from his brethren and the land of promise, Moses longs for his real home. Yet this feeling issues not in despondency, far less in disbelief or distrust. On the contrary, "the peaceable fruits of righteousness," springing from the "chastening" of the Lord, appear in the name of his second son; "for the God of my fathers,"

<sup>6</sup> Both in Exodus 2:16, and 3:1, the Hebrew expression for "flocks" implies that they consisted of sheep and goats, not of cattle, and thus affords another indirect testimony to the truth of the narrative, as only such flocks would be ordinarily pastured in that district.

<sup>7</sup> We must distinguish Reuel Jethro from Hobab, who seems to have been the son of Reuel, and brother-in-law of Moses, and to have accompanied Israel on their journey (see Judges 4:11). There is a little difficulty here, as the word rendered in our Authorized Version "father-in-law" really means every relative by marriage.



said he, "is mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh." The self-confidence and carnal zeal manifest in his early attempt to deliver his brethren in Egypt have been quenched in the land of his banishment, and in the school of sorrow. And the result of all he has suffered and learned has been absolute trustfulness in the God of his fathers, the God of the promises, Who would surely fulfill His word.

#### **II\_04 The Call of Moses - The Vision of the Burning Bush - The Commission to Pharaoh and to Israel - The three "Signs" and their Meaning.**

##### **Exodus 2:23; 4:17**

WHEN God is about to do any of His great works, He first silently prepares all for it. Not only the good seed to be scattered, but the breaking up of the soil for its reception is His. Instrumentalities, unrecognized at the time, are silently at work; and, together with the good gift to be bestowed on His own, He grants them the felt need and the earnest seeking of it. Thus prayers and answers are, as it were, the scales of grace in equipoise.

It was not otherwise when God would work the great deliverance of His people from Egypt. Once more it seemed as if the clouds overhead were just then darkest and heaviest. One king had died and another succeeded;<sup>8</sup> but the change of government brought not to Israel that relief which they had probably expected. Their bondage seemed now part of the settled policy of the Pharaohs. Not one ray of hope lit up their sufferings other than what might have been derived from faith. But centuries had passed without any communication or revelation from the God of their fathers!

It must therefore be considered a revival of religion when, under such circumstances, the people, instead of either despairing or plotting rebellion against Pharaoh, turned in earnest prayer unto the Lord, or, as the sacred text puts it, significantly adding the definite article before God, (Exodus 2:23) "cried" "unto the God," that is, not as unto one out of many, but unto the only

true and living God. This spirit of prayer, now for the first time appearing among them, was the first pledge and harbinger, indeed, the commencement of their deliverance. (Exodus 3:7; Deuteronomy 26:7) For though only "a cry," so to speak, spiritually inarticulate, no intervening period of time divided their prayer from its answer. "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them" - literally, He "knew them," that is, recognized them as the chosen seed of Abraham, and, recognizing, manifested His love towards them.

The southern end of the peninsula of Sinai, to which the sacred narrative now takes us, consists of a confused mass of peaks (the highest above 9,000 feet), some of dark green porphyry, but mostly red granite of different hues, which is broken by strips of sand or gravel, intersected by wadies or glens, which are the beds of winter torrents, and dotted here and there with green spots, chiefly due to perennial fountains. The great central group among these mountains is that of Horeb, and one special height in it Sinai, the "mount of God." Strangely enough it is just here amidst this awful desolateness that the most fertile places in "the wilderness" are also found. Even in our days part of this plateau is quite green. Hither the Bedouin drive their flocks when summer has parched all the lower districts. Fruit-trees grow in rich luxuriance in its valleys, and "the neighborhood is the best watered in the whole peninsula, running streams being found in no less than four of the adjacent valleys." It was thither that Moses, probably in the early summer, drove Reuel's flock for pasturage and water. Behind him, to the east, lay the desert; before him rose in awful grandeur the mountain of God. The stillness of this place is unbroken; its desolateness only relieved by the variety of coloring in the dark green or the red mountain peaks, some of which "shine in the sunlight like burnished copper." The atmosphere is such that the most distant outlines stand out clearly defined, and the faintest sound falls distinctly on the ear. All at once truly a "strange sight" presented itself. On a solitary crag, or in some sequestered valley, one of those spiked, gnarled, thorny acacia trees, which form so conspicuous a

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 2:23. We must ask the reader to read this chapter with the open Bible beside him.

feature in the wadies of" the desert," of which indeed they are. The only timber tree of any size," stood enwrapped in fire, and yet "the bush was not consumed."

At view of this, Moses turned aside "to see this great sight." And yet greater wonder than this awaited him. A vision which for centuries had not been seen now appeared; a voice which had been silent these many ages again spoke. "The Angel of Jehovah" (ver. 2), who is immediately afterwards Himself called "Jehovah" and "God" (vers. 4, 5), spake to him "out of the midst of the bush." His first words warned Moses to put his shoes from off his feet, as standing on holy ground; the next revealed Him as the same Angel of the Covenant, who had appeared unto the fathers as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." The reason of the first injunction was not merely reverence, but it was prompted by the character of Him who spoke. For in the East shoes are worn chiefly as protection from defilement and dust, and hence put off when entering a sanctuary, in order, as it were, not to bring within the pure place defilement from without. But the place where Jehovah manifests Himself - whatever it be - is "holy ground," and he who would have communication with Him must put aside the defilement that clings to him. In announcing Himself as the God of the fathers, Jehovah now declared the continuity of His former purpose of mercy, His remembrance of Israel, and His speedy fulfillment of the promises given of old. During these centuries of silence He had still been the same, ever mindful of His covenant, and now, just as it might seem that His purpose had wholly failed, the set time had come, when He would publicly manifest Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.<sup>9</sup>

The same truth was symbolically expressed by the vision of the burning bush. Israel, in its present low and despised state, was like the thorn bush in the wilderness (comp. Judges 9:15), burning in the fiery "furnace of Egypt," (Deuteronomy 4:20) but "not given over unto death," because Jehovah, the

Angel of the Covenant, was "in the midst of the bush" - a God who chastened, but did "not consume." And this vision was intended not only for Moses, but for all times. It symbolizes the relationship between God and Israel at all times, and similarly that between Him and His Church. For the circumstances in which the Church is placed, and the purpose of God towards it, continue always the same. But this God, in the midst of the flames of the bush, is also a consuming fire, alike in case of forgetfulness of the covenant on the part of His people, (Deuteronomy 4:24) and as "a fire" that "burneth up His enemies round about." (Psalm 97:3) This manifestation of God under the symbol of fire, which on comparison will be seen to recur through all Scripture, shall find its fullest accomplishment when the Lord Jesus shall come to judge - "His eyes as a flame of fire, and on His head many crowns." (Revelation 19:12)

But as for Moses, he "hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God." The vision vouchsafed, and the words which accompanied it, prepare us for the further communication which the Lord was pleased to make to His servant. He had heard the cry of His people; He knew their sorrows, and He had come to deliver and bring them into the Land of Promise, "a good land," it is added, "and a large," a land "flowing with milk and honey" - large and fruitful enough to have been at the time the territory of not fewer than six Canaanitish races (ver. 8). Finally, the Lord directed Moses to go to Pharaoh in order to bring His people out of Egypt.

Greater contrast could scarcely be conceived than between the Moses of forty years ago and him who now pleaded to be relieved from this work. If formerly his self-confidence had been such as to take the whole matter into his own hands, his self-diffidence now went the length of utmost reluctance to act, even, as only the Lord's messenger and minister. His first and deepest feelings speak themselves in the question, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (ver. 11). But the remembrance of former inward and outward failure was no longer applicable, for God Himself would now be with

<sup>9</sup> Even the expression, "I am the God of thy father," in the singular number, implies the identity of His dealings throughout. All the fathers were but as one father before Him. So closely should we study the wording of Scripture.



him. In token of this he was told, "When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain." Evidently this "token" appealed to his faith, as indeed every "sign" does, whence their misunderstanding by those "who are not of the household of faith" (comp. Matthew 12:38, 39; Luke 16:31).

Similarly, long afterwards, a distantly future event - the birth of the Virgin's Son - was to be a sign to the house of Ahaz of the preservation of the royal line of David. (Isaiah 7:10-14) Was it then that underneath all else God saw in the heart of Moses a want of realizing faith, and that He would now call it forth? This first difficulty, on the part of Moses, had been set aside. His next was: What should he say in reply to this inquiry of Israel about God? "What is His Name?" (ver. 13). This means, What was he to tell them in answer to their doubts and fears about God's purposes towards them? For, in Scripture, the name is regarded as the manifestation of character or of deepest purpose, whence also a new name was generally given after some decisive event, which forever after stamped its character upon a person or place.

In answer to this question, the Lord explained to Moses, and bade him tell Israel, the import of the name Jehovah, by which He had at the first manifested Himself, when entering into covenant with Abraham. (Genesis 15:7) It was, "I am that I am" - words betokening His unchangeable nature and faithfulness. The "I am" had sent Moses, and, as if to remove all doubt, he was to add "the God of your fathers, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." "This," the Lord declares, "is my Name forever, and this is my memorial to all generations;" in other words, as such He would always prove Himself, and as such He willeth to be known and remembered, not only by Israel, but "to all generations." Here, then, at the very outset, when the covenant with Abraham was transferred to his seed, the promise also, which included all nations in its blessing, was repeated. In further preparation for his mission, God directed Moses on his arrival in Egypt to "gather" the elders of Israel together, and, taking up the very words of Joseph's prophecy when he died, (Genesis 1:24) to announce that the promised time had come, and that God had "surely visited" His people. Israel, he was told, would hearken to his voice; not so

Pharaoh, although the original demand upon him was to be only to dismiss the people for a distance of three days' journey into the wilderness. Yet Pharaoh would not yield, "not even by a strong hand" (ver. 19) - that is, even when the strong hand of God would be upon him. But, at the last, the wonder-working power of Jehovah would break the stubborn will of Pharaoh; and when Israel left Egypt it would not be as fugitives, but, as it were, like conquerors laden with the spoil of their enemies.

Thus the prediction clearly intimated that only after a long and severe contest Pharaoh would yield. But would the faith of Israel endure under such a trial? This is probably the meaning of Moses' next question, seemingly strange as put at this stage:

"But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, Jehovah hath not appeared unto thee." (Exodus 4:1)

To such doubts, whether on the part of Israel, of Pharaoh, or of the Egyptians, a threefold symbolical reply was now furnished, and that not only to silence those who might so object, but also for the encouragement of Moses himself. This reply involved the bestowal of power upon Moses to work miracles. We note that here, for the first time in Old Testament history, this power was bestowed upon man, and that the occasion was the first great conflict between the world and the Church. These miracles were intended to be like "a voice" from heaven, bearing direct testimony to the truth of Moses' commission. So we read in Exodus 4:8 of Israel "hearkening unto" and "believing" "the voice" of the signs, and in Psalm 105:27 (marginal reading) that Moses and Aaron "shewed the words of His signs among them." But while this was the general purpose of the three signs now displayed - first to Moses himself - each had also its special reference. The first to Pharaoh, the second to Israel, and the third to the might of Egypt.

In the first sign Moses was bidden to look at the rod in his hand. It was but an ordinary shepherd's staff, At God's command he was to cast it on the ground, when presently it was changed into a serpent, from which Moses fled in terror. Again God commands, and as Moses seized the serpent

by the tail, it once more "became a rod in his hand." The meaning of this was plain. Hitherto Moses had wielded the shepherd's crook. At God's command he was to cast it away; his calling was to be changed, and he would have to meet "the serpent" - not only the old enemy, but the might of Pharaoh, of which the serpent was the public and well-known Egyptian emblem.<sup>10</sup> "The serpent was the symbol of royal and divine power on the diadem of every Pharaoh" - the emblem of the land, of its religion, and government.

At God's command, Moses next seized this serpent, when it became once more in his hand the staff with which he led his flock - only that now the flock was Israel, and the shepherd's staff the wonder-working "rod of God." (Exodus 4:20) In short, the humble shepherd, who would have fled from Pharaoh, should, through Divine strength, overcome all the might of Egypt.

The second sign shown to Moses bore direct reference to Israel. The hand which Moses was directed to put in his bosom became covered with leprosy; but the same hand, when a second time he thrust it in, was restored whole. This miraculous power of inflicting and removing a plague, universally admitted to come from God, showed that Moses could inflict and remove the severest judgments of God. But it spoke yet other "words" to the people. Israel, of whom the Lord had said unto Moses, "Carry them in thy bosom," (Numbers 11:12) was the leprous hand. But as surely and as readily as it was restored when thrust again into Moses' bosom, so would God bring them forth from the misery and desolateness of their state in Egypt, and restore them to their own land.

The third sign given to Moses, in which the water from the Nile when poured upon the ground was to become blood, would not only carry conviction to Israel, but bore special reference to the land of Egypt. The Nile, on which its whole fruitfulness depended, and which the Egyptians worshipped as divine, was to be changed into blood. Egypt and

its gods were to be brought low before the absolute power which God would manifest.

These "signs," which could not be gainsaid, were surely sufficient. And yet Moses hesitated. Was he indeed the proper agent for such a work? He possessed not the eloquence whose fire kindles a nation's enthusiasm and whose force sweeps before it all obstacles. And when this objection also was answered by pointing him to the need of direct dependence on Him who could unloose the tongue and open eyes and ears, the secret reluctance of Moses broke forth in the direct request to employ someone else on such a mission. Then it was that "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses." Yet in His tender mercy He pitied and helped the weakness of His servant's faith. For this twofold purpose God announced that even then Aaron was on his way to join him, and that he would undertake the part of the work for which Moses felt himself unfit. Aaron would be alike the companion and, so to speak, "the prophet" of Moses. (Exodus 7:1) As the prophet delivers the word which he receives, so would Aaron declare the Divine message committed to Moses. "AND MOSES WENT." (Exodus 4:18)

Two points yet require brief explanation at this stage of our narrative. For, first, it would appear that the request which Moses was in the first place charged to address to Pharaoh was only for leave "to go three days journey into the wilderness," whereas it was intended that Israel should forever leave the land of Egypt. Secondly, a Divine promise was given that Israel should "not go empty," but that God would give the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, and that every woman should "borrow of her neighbor," so that they would "spoil the Egyptians."

At the outset, we observe the more than dutiful manner in which Israel was directed to act towards Pharaoh. Absolutely the king, Pharaoh had no right to detain the people in Egypt. Their fathers had avowedly come not to settle, but temporarily "to sojourn," (Genesis 47:4) and on that understanding they had been received. And now they were not only wrongfully oppressed, but unrighteously detained. But still they were not to steal away secretly, nor yet to attempt to raise the standard of rebellion.

<sup>10</sup> Scripture frequently uses the serpent as a symbol of the power hostile to the kingdom of God, and applies the figure not only to Egypt (as in Psalms 74:13; Isaiah 51:9), but also to Babylon (Isaiah 27:1).

Nor was the Divine power with which Moses was armed to be at the first employed either in avenging their past wrongs or in securing their liberty.

On the contrary, they were to apply to Pharaoh for permission to undertake even so harmless an expedition as a three days pilgrimage into the wilderness to sacrifice unto God - a request all the more reasonable, that Israel's sacrifices would, from a religious point of view, have been "an abomination" to the Egyptians, (Exodus 8:62) and might have led to disturbances. The same almost excess of regard for Pharaoh prompted that at the first only so moderate a demand should be made upon him. It was infinite condescension to Pharaoh's weakness, on the part of God, not to insist from the first upon the immediate and entire dismissal of Israel. Less could not have been asked than was demanded of Pharaoh, nor could obedience have been made more easy. Only the most tyrannical determination to crush the rights and convictions of the people, and the most daring defiance of Jehovah, could have prompted him to refuse such a request, and that in face of all the signs and wonders by which the mission of Moses was accredited. Thus at the first his submission was to be tried where it was easiest to render it, and where disobedience would be "without excuse."

There might have been some plea for such a man as Pharaoh to refuse at once and wholly to let those go who had so long been his bondsmen; there could be absolutely none for resisting a demand so moderate and supported by such authority. Assuredly such a man was ripe for the judgment of hardening; just as, on the other hand, if he had at the first yielded obedience to the Divine will, he would surely have been prepared to receive a further revelation of His will, and grace to submit to it. And so God in His mercy always deals with man. "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much." The demands of God are intended to try what is in us. It was so in the case of Adam's obedience, of Abraham's sacrifice, and now of Pharaoh; only that in the latter case, as in the promise to spare Sodom if even ten righteous men were found

among its wicked inhabitants, the Divine forbearance went to the utmost verge of condescension. The same principle of government also appears in the New Testament, and explains how the Lord often first told of "earthly things," that unbelief in regard to them might convince men of their unfitness to hear of "heavenly things." Thus the young ruler (Matthew 19:16) who believed himself desirous of inheriting eternal life, and the scribe who professed readiness to follow Christ, (Matthew 8:19) had each only a test of "earthly things" proposed, and yet each failed in it. The lesson is one which may find its application in our own ease - for only "then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord."

The second difficulty about the supposed direction to Israel to "borrow jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment," and so to "spoil the Egyptians," (Exodus 3:22) rests upon a simple misunderstanding of the text. Common sense even would indicate that, under the circumstances in which the children of Israel, at the last, left the land, no Egyptian could have contemplated a temporary loan of jewels, soon to be repaid. But, in truth, the word rendered in our Authorized Version by "borrowing," does not mean a loan and is not used in that sense in a single passage in which it occurs throughout the Old Testament. It always and only means "to ask" or to request." This "request," or "demand" - as, considering the justice of the case, we should call it - was readily granted by the Egyptians. The terror of Israel had fallen on them, and instead of leaving Egypt as fugitives, they marched out like a triumphant host, carrying with them "the spoil" of their Divinely conquered enemies.

It is of more importance to notice another point. Moses was the first to bear a Divine commission to others. He was also the first to work miracles. Miracles present to us the union of the Divine and the human. All miracles pointed forward to the greatest of all miracles, "the mystery of godliness, into which angels desire to look; "the union of the Divine with the human" in its fullest appearance in the Person of the God-Man. Thus in these two aspects of his office, as well as in his mission to redeem Israel from bondage and to sanctify them

unto the Lord, Moses was an eminent type of Christ.

"Wherefore" let us "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to Him that appointed Him, as also Moses 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 3:1, 2, 5, 6)

## **II\_05 Moses Returns into Egypt - The Dismissal of Zipporah - Moses meets Aaron - Their Reception by the Children of Israel - Remarks on the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart**

### **Exodus 15:17-31**

SCRIPTURE-HISTORY is full of seemingly strange contrasts. Unintelligible to the superficial observer, the believing heart rejoices to trace in them, side by side, the difference between what appears to the eye of man and what really is before God; and then between the power of God, and the humbleness of the means and circumstances through which He chooses to manifest it. The object of the one is to draw out our faith, and to encourage it in circumstances which least promise success; that of the other, to give all the glory to God, and ever to direct our eye from earth to heaven. So it was, when, in the days of His flesh, neither Israel nor the Gentiles recognized the royal dignity of Christ in Him who entered Jerusalem, "meek, and riding upon an ass and the colt of an ass." And so it also appeared, when, in the simple language of Scripture, "Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an, ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand." (Exodus 4:20)

What a contrast! He who bears in his hand the rod of God is dismissed in this mean manner - his wife and sons, and all their goods laden on one ass, and himself humbly walking by their side! Who would have recognized in this humble guise him who carried that by which he would smite down the pride of Pharaoh and the might of Egypt?

On his return from "the mount of God," Moses had simply announced to his father-in-law his purpose of revisiting Egypt. Probably Jethro had not

sufficient enlightenment for Moses to communicate to him the Divine vision. Besides, the relations between them at the time (as we gather even from the manner in which Jethro allowed him to depart) seem not to have been such as to invite special confidence; possibly, it might have only raised hindrances on the part of Jethro or of Zipporah. But it was an indication that God furthered his way, when alike his father-in-law and his wife so readily agreed to an expedition which, in the circumstances, might have been fraught with great danger. And this was not all. After he had resolved to go, but before he actually set out, God encouraged him by the information that all the men were dead who had sought his life. Again, while on his journey, He gave him threefold strengthening for the work before him. First, He pointed him to the Divine rod in his hand, with which he was to attest by miracles his mission to Pharaoh. (Exodus 4:21) Secondly, lest he should be discouraged by the failure of these signs to secure Pharaoh's submission, God not only foretold the hardening of the king's heart, but by saying, "I will harden his heart" (ver. 21), proved that that event also was under His own immediate control and direction. Lastly, in the message which he was to bear to Pharaoh a double assurance was conveyed (vers. 22, 23). Jehovah demanded freedom for the people, because "Israel is my son, even my firstborn," and He threatened, in case of Pharaoh's refusal, "to slay" his "son," even the king's "firstborn." So terrible a threat was to prove the earnestness of the Divine demand and purpose. On the other hand, the tide given to Israel implied that God would not leave "His firstborn" in the bondage of Egypt. In the contest with Pharaoh Jehovah would surely prevail. That precious relationship between God and His people, which was fully established in the covenant at Mount Sinai, (Exodus 19:5) might be said to have commenced with the call of Abraham. Israel was "the son of God" by election, by grace, and by adoption (Deuteronomy 32:18; Isaiah 64:8; Jeremiah 3:4; Malachi 1:6; 2:10) As such, the Lord would never withdraw His love from him, (Hosea 11:1; Jeremiah 31:9-20) but pity him even as a father his children; (Psalm 103:13) and, although He would chasten the people for their sins, yet would He not withdraw His mercy from

them. Such a relationship is nowhere else in the Old Testament indicated as subsisting between God and any other nation. But it is exceedingly significant that Israel is only called "the firstborn." For this conveys that Israel was not to be alone in the family of God, but that, in accordance with the promise to Abraham, other sons should be born into the Father's house. Thus even the highest promise spoken to Israel included in it the assurance of future blessing to the Gentiles.

And yet he who was to declare Israel the heir to this precious legacy was himself at the time living in neglect of the sign of that very covenant! His own second son <sup>11</sup> had not been circumcised according to the Divine commandment (Genesis 17:14) - whether from neglect, owing to faith discouraged, or, more probably, as we gather from the subsequent conduct of Zipporah, on account of his wife's opposition, which in his depressed circumstances he could not overcome. But judgment must begin at the house of God; and no one is fit to be employed as an instrument for God who in any way lives in neglect of His commandments. God met even His chosen servant Moses as an enemy. His life was in imminent danger, and Zipporah had to submit, however reluctantly, to the ordinance of God. But her mood and manner showed that as yet she was not prepared to be Moses' helpmate in the work before him. He seems to have understood this, and to have sent her and the children back to his father-in-law. Only at a later period, when he had "heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people," did Jethro himself bring them again to Moses. (Exodus 18:1-7)

Thus purged from the leaven of sin, Moses continued his journey. Once more God had anticipated His servant's difficulties; we might almost say, the fulfillment of His own promises. Already He had directed Aaron "to go into the wilderness to meet Moses." At the mount of God the two brothers met, and Aaron willingly joined the Divine mission of Moses. Arrived in Egypt, they soon "gathered together all the elders of the

children of Israel." At hearing of the gracious tidings which Aaron announced, and at sight of "the signs" with which he attested them, it is said, "they bowed their heads and worshipped." Then God had not forsaken His people whom He foreknew! So then, not Moses' unbelieving fears (4:1), but God's gracious promise (3:18), had in this respect also been amply realized. Neither their long stay in Egypt nor their bondage had extinguished their faith in the God of their fathers, or their hope of deliverance. However grievously they might afterwards err and sin, the tidings that "Jehovah had visited" His people came not upon them as strange or incredible. More than that, their faith was mingled with humiliation and worship.

Before we pass to an account of the wonders by which Moses was so soon to prove before Pharaoh the reality of his mission, it may be convenient here briefly to consider a very solemn element in the history of these transactions - we mean, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Not that we can ever hope fully to understand what touches the counsels of God, the administration of His government, the mysterious connection between the creature and the Creator, and the solemn judgments by which He vindicates His power over the rebellious. But a reverent consideration of some points, taken directly from the text itself, may help us at least, like Israel of old, to "bow our heads and worship." We have already noticed, that before Moses had returned into Egypt, (Exodus 4:21) God had declared of Pharaoh, "I will harden his heart," placing this phase in the foreground, that Moses might be assured of God's overruling will in the matter. For a similar purpose, only much more fully expressed, God now again announced to Moses, before the commencement of the ten plagues, (Exodus 7:3)

"I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt."

These are the two first statements about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. In both cases the agency is ascribed to God; but in both cases the event is yet future, and the announcement is only made in order to explain to Moses what his faith almost needed to know.

Twice ten times in the course of this history does the expression hardening occur in connection with

<sup>11</sup> From Exodus 4:25, we gather that only one son required to be circumcised. This would, of course, be the younger of the two.

Pharaoh. Although in our English version only the word "harden" is used, in the Hebrew original three different terms are employed, of which one (as in Exodus 7:3) literally means to make hard or insensible, the other (as in 10:1) to make heavy, that is, unimpressionable, and the third (as in 14:4), to make firm or stiff, so as to be immovable. Now it is remarkable, that of the twenty passages which speak of Pharaoh's hardening, exactly ten ascribe it to Pharaoh himself, and ten to God,<sup>12</sup> and that in both cases precisely the same three terms are used. Thus the making "hard," "heavy," and "firm" of the heart is exactly as often and in precisely the same terms traced to the agency of Pharaoh himself as to that of God. As a German writer aptly remarks, "The effect of the one is the hardening of man to his own destruction; that of the other, the hardening of man to the glory of God."

Proceeding further, we find that, with the exception of the two passages (Exodus 4:21; 7:3) in which the Divine agency in hardening is beforehand announced to Moses for his instruction, the hardening process is during the course of the actual history, in the first place, traced only to Pharaoh himself. Thus, before the ten plagues, and when Aaron first proved his Divine mission by converting the rod into a serpent, (Exodus 7:10) "the heart of Pharaoh was hardened," that is, by himself (vers. 13, 14).<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, after each of the first five plagues (7:22; 8:15; 8:19; 8:32; 9:7) the hardening is also expressly attributed to Pharaoh himself. Only when still resisting after the sixth plague do we read for the first time, that "the Lord made firm the heart of Pharaoh" (9:12). But even so, space for repentance must have been left, for after the

seventh plague we read again (9:34) that "Pharaoh made heavy his heart;" and it is only after the eighth plague that the agency is exclusively ascribed to God. Moreover, we have to consider the progress of this hardening on the part of Pharaoh, by which at last his sin became ripe for judgment. It was not only that he resisted the demand of Moses, even in view of the miraculous signs by which his mission was attested; but that, step by step, the hand of God became more clearly manifest, till at last he was, by his own confession, "inexcusable." If the first sign of converting the rod into a serpent could in a certain manner be counterfeited by the Egyptian magicians, yet Aaron's rod swallowed up theirs (7:12). But after the third plague, the magicians themselves confessed their inability to carry on the contest, declaring, "This is the finger of God" (8:9). If any doubt had still been left upon his mind, it must have been removed by the evidence presented after the fifth plague (9:7), when "Pharaoh sent, and, behold, there was not one of the cattle of the Israelites dead." Some of the Egyptians, at least, had profited by this lesson, and on the announcement of the seventh plague housed their cattle from the predicted hail and fire (9:20, 21). Lastly, after that seventh plague, Pharaoh himself acknowledged his sin and wrong (9:27), and promised to let Israel go (ver. 28). Yet after all, on its removal, he once more hardened his heart (ver. 35)!

Can we wonder that such high-handed and inexcusable rebellion should have been ripe for the judgment which appeared in the Divine hardening of his heart? Assuredly in such a contest between the pride and daring of the creature and the might of the Lord God, the truth of this Divine declaration had to be publicly manifested:

"Even for this purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth."  
(Romans 9:17)

For the long-suffering and patience of God will not always wait. It is indeed most true, that "God hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he be converted and live;" (Ezekiel 33:11) and that He "will have all men come to the

<sup>12</sup> Perhaps we ought to mark that ten is the number of completeness. The ten passages in which the hardening is traced to Pharaoh himself are: Exodus 7:13 ("the heart of Pharaoh was firm" or "stiff"); ver. 14 ("was heavy"); ver. 22 ("firm"); 8:15 ("made heavy"); ver. 19 (was "firm"); ver. 32; 9:7, 34 ("heavy"); ver. 35 ("firm"); 13:15 ("Pharaoh made hard," viz., his heart). The ten passages in which it is traced to the agency of God are: Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1; 10:20; 10:27; 11:10; 14:4; 14:8; 14:17.

<sup>13</sup> The rendering in our Authorized Version conveys a wrong impression, as if God had hardened Pharaoh's heart.



knowledge of the truth and be saved." (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9)

But "he that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." (Proverbs 29:1)

The same manifestation of God which to the believing is "a savor of life unto life," is to those who resist it "a savor of death unto death." As one has written, "the sunlight shining upon our earth produces opposite results according to the nature of the soil." In Scripture language: (Hebrews 6:7, 8) "the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned." Or, as a German writer puts it, "It is the curse of sin that it makes the hard heart ever harder against the gracious drawing of the Divine love, patience, and long-suffering."

Thus they who harden themselves fall at last under the Divine judgment of hardening, with all the terrible consequences which it involves.

Hitherto we have only traced this as it appears in the course of Pharaoh's history. There are, however, deeper bearings of the question, connected with the Divine dealings, the sovereignty, and the power of God. For such inquiries this is obviously not the place. Suffice it to draw some practical lessons. First and foremost, we learn the insufficiency of even the most astounding miracles to subdue the rebellious will, to change the heart, or to subject a man unto God. Our blessed Lord Himself has said of a somewhat analogous case, that men would not believe even though one rose from the dead. (Luke 16:31) And His statement has been only too amply verified in the history of the world since His own resurrection. Religion is matter of the heart, and no intellectual conviction, without the agency Of the Holy Spirit, affects the inmost springs of our lives. Secondly, a more terrible exhibition of the daring of human pride, the confidence of worldly power, and the deceitfulness of sin than that presented by the history of this Pharaoh can scarcely be conceived. And yet the lesson seems to have been overlooked by too many! Not only sacred history but possibly our own experience may furnish

instances of similar tendencies; and in the depths of his own soul each believer must have felt his danger in this respect, for "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Lastly, resistance to God must assuredly end in fearful judgment. Each conviction suppressed, each admonition stifled, each loving offer rejected, tends towards increasing spiritual insensibility, and that in which it ends. It is wisdom and safety to watch for the blessed influences of God's Spirit, and to throw open our hearts to the sunlight of His grace.

## **II\_06 Moses and Aaron deliver their Message to Pharaoh - Increased Oppression of Israel - Discouragement of Moses - Aaron shows a Sign - General View and Analysis of each of the Ten "Strokes" or Plagues**

### **Exodus 5:1 to 12:30**

THE predicted trial was soon to come. Provoked through the daring of man, who would measure his strength against that of the living God, it was to establish two facts for all ages and to all mankind. In sight of Egypt (Exodus 7:5) and of Israel (10:2) it was to evidence that God was Jehovah, the only true and the living God, far above all power of men and of gods. (Exodus 9:14) This was one aspect of the judgments which were to burst upon Egypt. (Romans 9:17) The other was, that He was the faithful Covenant-God, who remembered His promises, and would bring out His people "with a stretched-out arm and with great judgments," to take them to Himself for a people, and to be to them a God (4:1-8). These are the eternal truths which underlie the history of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. How Israel had understood and taught them to their children, appears from many passages of Scripture, especially from Psalm 78 and 105. Nor is their application less suited to our wants. It exhibits alike the Law and the Gospel - the severity and the goodness of God - and may be summed up in that grand proclamation unto all the world: "Jehovah reigneth." (Psalm 99:1)

The sacred narrative here consists of two parts, the one preparatory, so far as all parties in this history are concerned - Pharaoh, Israel, and Moses; the other describing the successive "signs" in which Jehovah manifested Himself and His power, and by which He achieved both the deliverance of

Israel and His judgments upon Pharaoh and Egypt. And here we shall notice successive progress, externally in the character of the Plagues sent by God, and internally in their effect upon Pharaoh and his people. Twice, before the plagues laid low the pride of Egypt, Moses and Aaron had to appear before Pharaoh, once with a simple message (5:1-5), the second time both with a message and a sign to attest their mission (6:10-13; 7:8-13). In this also we mark the Divine condescension and goodness. If at the first interview the king could say,

"Who is Jehovah, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, neither will I let Israel go" (Exodus 5:2),

it became impossible to urge this plea, when, at the king's challenge, "Shew a miracle for you" (7:9), Aaron's rod was changed into a serpent. This proved beyond doubt that Jehovah was God, and that he had commissioned His servants, since they wielded His power. The only question still possible was, whether the gods whom Pharaoh served were equal to the Lord. For this purpose the king summoned his magicians, who imitated, in a certain way, the miracle of Aaron. But even so, the inferiority of their power was proven when "Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods." This assuredly - even taking their own profession of miracle-working - should have been sufficient to indicate to Pharaoh that "Jehovah, He is God" - had his hardness of heart admitted of such conviction. But as between Moses' and Aaron's first and second interview with Pharaoh important events occurred, it may be well briefly to record them again in their order.

After the first interview, in which Moses and Aaron had simply delivered the Divine command, Pharaoh, who had pleaded ignorance of Jehovah (that is, of His Deity and claims), professed to regard the demand of Moses as a mere pretense to procure a series of holidays for the people. They were "vain words" (5:9) "to let the people from their works" (ver. 4). As "the people of the land" - that is, the Israelites, the laboring class - were "many," to "make them rest from their burdens" (ver. 5) would inflict great damage upon the king. To prevent their having either time or inclination to listen to such suggestions, the king ordered that,

while the old amount of work should continue to be exacted, the straw needful for making the sun-dried bricks (such as we find on the monuments of Egypt) should no longer be supplied. The time requisite for gathering "stubble instead of straw" prevented, of course, their fulfilling their "daily tasks."

The punishment then fell upon the Israelitish "officers," or rather "scribes," whom the Egyptian "taskmasters" had set over the work and held responsible for it. An appeal to Pharaoh only explained the cause of his increased severity, and the "officers" of a people which but lately had acknowledged that God had visited them, not seeing that visitation, but rather seemingly the opposite, ventured in their unbelief to appeal to Jehovah against Moses and Aaron! So rapidly do the results of a faith which cometh only by the hearing of the ear give way before discouragements.

As for Moses, the hour of his severest trial had now come. With the words of Israel's complaint he went straight to the Lord, yet, as St. Augustine remarks, not in the language of contumacy or of anger, but of inquiry and prayer. To his question, "Lord, wherefore hast Thou so evil entreated this people?" (5:22) - as so often to our inquiries into God's "Wherefore" - no reply of any kind was made. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." To us, indeed, the "need be" of making the yoke of Egypt as galling as possible seems now evident, as we remember how the heart of the people clung to the flesh-pots of Egypt, even after they had tasted the heavenly manna; (Numbers 11) and the yet higher "need be for it," since the lower Israel's condition and the more tyrannical Pharaoh's oppression, the more glorious the triumph of Jehovah, and the more complete the manifestation of His enemy's impotence. But in Moses it only raised once more, at this season of depression, the question of his fitness for the work which he had undertaken. For when Satan cannot otherwise oppose, he calls forth in us unbelieving doubts as to our aptitude or call for a work. The direction which Moses now received from God applies, in principle, to all similar cases. It conveyed a fresh assurance that God would certainly accomplish His purpose; it gave a fuller

revelation of His character as Jehovah, with the special promises which this implied (6:2-8); and it renewed the commission to Moses to undertake the work, accompanied by encouragements and assurances suitable in the circumstances.

One point here claims special attention, not only on account of the difficulties which it presents to the general reader, but also because its lessons are so precious. When, on the occasion just referred to, God said to Moses (Exodus 6:2, 3),

"I am Jehovah and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob in El Shaddai (God Almighty), but as to My name Jehovah was I not known to them,"

it cannot, of course, mean, that the patriarchs were ignorant of the special designation Jehovah, since it frequently occurs in their history.<sup>14</sup> To understand this passage aright, we must bear in mind the meaning of the expression "name" as applied to God, and that of the term "Jehovah." By the "name of God" we are of course to understand not a mere appellation of God, but that by which He makes Himself known to man. Now Scripture teaches us that we only know God in so far as He manifests, or reveals Himself. Hence the peculiar name of God indicates the peculiar manner in which He had manifested Himself, or, in other words, the character, of His dealings at the time. Now the character of God's dealings - and therefore His name - was in patriarchal times unquestionably El Shaddai (Genesis 17:1; 35:11; 48:3). But His manifestation as Jehovah - the dealings by which, in the sight of all men, He made Himself known as such - belonged not to that, but to a later period. For the term "Jehovah" literally means, "He who is," which agrees with the explanation given by God Himself. "He who is that He is." (Exodus 3:14) As here used, the word "to be" refers not to the essential nature of God, but to His relationship towards man. In that relationship God manifested Himself, and He was known as Jehovah - as "He who is that He is," in other words, as unchangeable - when, after centuries of silence, and after the condition of

Israel in Egypt had become almost hopeless, He showed that He had not forgotten His promise given to the fathers, that He had all along been preparing its fulfillment; and that neither the resistance of Pharaoh nor the might of Egypt could stay His hand. Viewed in this light, the distinction between the original El Shaddai manifestation to the patriarchs and the Jehovah knowledge vouchsafed to the children of Israel becomes both clear and emphatic.

But to return. The first interview of Moses with Pharaoh had served to determine the relationship of all parties in reference to the Divine command. It had brought out the enmity of Pharaoh, ripening for judgment; the unbelief of Israel, needing much discipline; and even the weakness of Moses. There, at the outset of his work, even as the Lord Jesus at the commencement of His ministry, he was tempted of the adversary, and overcame by the word of God. Yet how great in this also, is the difference between the type and the Antitype!

Still, though hardly fought, the contest was gained, and Moses and Aaron confronted a second time the king of Egypt. On this occasion Aaron, when challenged by Pharaoh, proved his fight to speak in the name of God. He cast down his rod, and it became a serpent, and although "the magicians of Egypt" "did in like manner with their enchantments," the superiority of Aaron appeared when his "rod swallowed up their rods." Without here entering into the general question of magic before the coming of our Lord, or of the power which the devil and his agents may have wielded on earth before our Savior subdued his might, and led captivity captive, there was really nothing in what the Egyptian magicians did that Eastern jugglers do not profess to this day. To make a serpent stiff and to look like a rod, and then again suddenly to restore it to life, are among the commonest tricks witnessed by travelers. St. Paul mentions the names of Jannes and Jambres as those who "withstood Moses," (2 Timothy 3:8) and his statement is not only confirmed by Jewish tradition, but even referred to by the Roman writer Pliny. Both their names are Egyptian, and one of them occurs in an ancient Egyptian document. In this connection it is also important to notice, that the Hebrew term for "the serpent," into which

<sup>14</sup> This view is, however, entertained by some - notably by Josephus, who holds that the name Jehovah was first revealed to Moses.

Aaron's rod was changed, is not that commonly used, but bears a more specific meaning. It is not the same term as that for the serpent (nachash) by which Moses was to accredit his mission before his own people, (Exodus 4:3, 4) but it indicated the kind of serpent (tannin) specially used by Egyptian conjurers, and bore pointed reference to the serpent as the great symbol of Egypt.<sup>15</sup> Hence also the expression "dragon," which is the proper rendering of the word, is frequently in Scripture used to denote Egypt. (Psalm 74:13; Isaiah 27:1; 51:9; Ezekiel 29:3; 32:2) Accordingly Pharaoh should have understood that, when Aaron's rod swallowed up the others, it pointed to the vanquishment of Egypt, and the executing of judgment "against all the gods of Egypt." (Exodus 12:12) Willfully to shut his eyes to this, and to regard Aaron and Moses as magicians whom his own equaled in power, was to harden his heart, and to call down those terrible plagues which ushered in the final judgment upon Pharaoh and his people.

Before describing in detail the plagues of Egypt, a few general remarks will be helpful to our understanding of the subject.

1. The plagues were miraculous - yet not so much in themselves as in the time, the manner, and the measure in which they came upon Egypt. None of them was wholly unknown in Egypt, but had visited the land at some time or other, and in some measure. As so often, the Lord here employed ordinary natural events. The supernaturalness of the plagues consisted in their severity, their successive occurrence, their coming and going at the word of Moses, their partial extent, and the unusual seasons and manner in which they appeared.

2. We mark in them a regular arrangement and steady progress. Properly speaking, there were only nine plagues (3 X 3), the tenth "stroke"<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> "It occurs in the Egyptian ritual, c. 163, nearly in the same form, 'Tanem,' as a synonym of the monster serpent which represents the principle of antagonism to light and life." - Speaker's Commentary, vol. 1., note 10.

<sup>16</sup> This is the literal meaning of the word rendered "plague," Exodus 11:1. Philo, however, and most interpreters, speak of ten plagues, and regard that number as symbolical of completeness.

being in reality the commencement of judgment by Jehovah Himself, when He went out "into the midst of Egypt" to slay its firstborn. Of these nine, the first three were in connection with that river and soil which formed the boast of Egypt, and the object of its worship. They extended over the whole country, and at the third the magicians confessed, "This is the finger of God." By them the land was laid low in its pride and in its religion. The other six came exclusively upon the Egyptians, as the Lord had said: "I will put a division between My people and thy people," "to the end that thou mayest know that I am Jehovah in the midst of the land."<sup>17</sup> If the first three plagues had shown the impotence of Egypt, the others proved that Jehovah reigned even in the midst of Egypt. Finally, the three last "strokes" were not only far more terrible than any of the others, but intended to make Pharaoh know "that there is none like Me in all the earth." (Exodus 9:14)

To show that Jehovah, He is God, that He was such in the midst of Egypt, and finally, that there was none like Him in the midst of all the earth - or, that Jehovah was the living and the true God - such was the threefold object of these "strokes."

3. In reference to the duration of these strokes, the interval between them, and the length of time occupied by all, we know that the first plague lasted seven days, (Exodus 7:25) and that the killing of the firstborn and the Passover occurred in the night of the fourteenth, Abib (or Nisan), corresponding to about the beginning of April. In reference to the seventh plague (that of the hail), we have this statement to guide us as to its time: (Exodus 9:31, 32) the flax and the barley was smitten, for the barley was in the ear, and the flax was boiled (or in blossom). But the wheat and the rice (or rather the spelt) were not smitten: for they were not grown." This would fix the time as about the end of January or the beginning of February, giving an interval of at least eight weeks between the seventh and the tenth stroke, or, if we might take this as an average, of more than two weeks between each plague. Computed at this rate, the first "stroke" would have fallen in September or

<sup>17</sup> Exodus 8:22, 23. So literally, and not "earth."

October, that is, after the cessation of the annual overflow of the Nile. But this seems unlikely, not only because the red coloring ordinarily appears in the river at the commencement of its increase, but because the expressions (7:19, 21) seem to imply that the river was then at its rise (and not on the decrease), and especially because just before this the Israelites are represented as gathering "stubble" for their bricks, which must have been immediately after the harvest, or about the end of April. Hence it seems more likely (as most interpreters suppose) that the first "stroke" fell upon Egypt about the middle of June, in which case from the first "plague" an interval of about ten months would have elapsed prior to the slaying of the firstborn. All this time did the Lord deal with Egypt, and Pharaoh was on his trial! There is, as we have already indicated, a terrible irony about "the plagues" of Egypt, since in the things in which Egypt exalted itself it was laid low.

We seem to hear it throughout,

"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall have them in derision." (Psalm 2:4)  
This will appear more clearly as we briefly consider each of the "strokes."

The first "stroke," or "Plague." Early in the morning, during the rise of the Nile, Pharaoh went down to the river to offer unto its waters the customary Divine worship. Probably, he was accompanied by his wise men and magicians. Here he was confronted by Moses with the message of God. On his refusal to listen, Moses smote, as he had threatened the waters with the rod of God, and the Nile, in all its branches, canals, cisterns, and reservoirs, <sup>18</sup> becomes red, like blood. Such a change of color in the Nile was by no means uncommon, or Pharaoh would scarcely have quite hardened his heart against the miracle. In ordinary times this appearance of the river arises partly from the red earth, which the swollen waters carry with them, and partly from the presence of small cryptogamic plants and animalcules (infusoria).

The supernaturalness of the event lay in its suddenness, in its appearance at the command of Moses, and in the now altered qualities of the

water. "The fish that was in the river died" - thus depriving the people of one of the main staples of their food; - "and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river," thus cutting off the main supply of their drink. Somehow the magicians, however, contrived to imitate this miracle, probably on some of the water that had been drawn before "the rod" had smitten the river. And so for seven days, throughout the whole land of Egypt, the blood-like, un-drinkable water in every household "vessel of wood" or of earthenware, and in the large stone troughs which stood for general use in the corners of streets and on village-roads, bore testimony for Jehovah. And the Egyptians had to dig round about the river, that their drinking-water might be filtered for use. But "Pharaoh turned and went into his house, neither did he set his heart to this also." The second "stroke" or "plague" - that of the frogs - was also in connection with the river Nile. At the same time it must be remembered that the frog was also connected with the most ancient forms of idolatry in Egypt, so that what was the object of their worship once more became their curse. Here also a natural occurrence, not uncommon in Egypt, rendered Pharaoh's unbelief not impossible. After the annual inundation of the Nile the mud not uncommonly produces thousands of frogs - called by the Arabs to this day by the name corresponding to the term used in the Bible. These frogs "are small, do not leap much, are much like toads, and fill the whole country with their croaking. They are rapidly consumed by the, ibis, which thus preserves the land from the stench described in Exodus 8:14. The supernaturalness of the visitation lay in their extraordinary number and troublesomeness (8:3), and in their appearance at the bidding of Moses. The magicians here also succeeded in imitating Moses upon a small scale. But apparently they were wholly unable to remove the plague, and Pharaoh had to ask the intercession of Moses, at the same time promising to let the people go. To give the king yet further proof that "the stroke" was not natural but of God, Moses left Pharaoh the option of himself fixing what time he pleased for their removal: "Glory over me: when shall I entreat for thee?" (8:9) - that is, let me not fix a time, but let me yield to thee the glory of fixing the exact time for the cessation of the

<sup>18</sup> This is the correct rendering of the expressions in Exodus 7:19.



plague. "But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite (literally, enlargement, breathing-space), he made heavy his heart."

The third stroke, as always the third in each of the three series of plagues, came unannounced to Pharaoh, and consisted, not exactly of what we call "lice," but rather of a kind of small insects, scarcely visible, but which penetrate everywhere and cause the most intense inconvenience. Sir S. Baker describes this visitation of vermin, which is not uncommon after the rice-harvest, in almost the words of Scripture: "It is as though the very dust were turned into lice." The "plague" came when Aaron, as directed by God, had smitten the dust of the earth with his rod. As twice before the river, so now the fertile soil, which the Egyptians also worshipped, became their curse. In vain the magicians tried to imitate this miracle. Their power was foiled. But, to neutralize the impression, they "said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of Elohim" (8:19) - the result of the power of a God. He has done this. Therefore, being in no way due to Moses and Aaron, it cannot confirm their demand. We are vanquished, yet not by Moses and Aaron, but by a Divine power equally superior to them and to us. Therefore "Pharaoh's heart was hardened" ("made firm" and insensible).

And now in the second series of plagues commenced the distinction between the Egyptians and Israel, <sup>19</sup> the latter being exempted from "the strokes," to show that it was not "the finger of Elohim merely," but that He was "Jehovah in the midst of the land" of Egypt (8:22). For the same reason, Moses and Aaron were not used as instruments in the fourth and fifth plagues. They were simply announced to Pharaoh by the messengers of Jehovah, but inflicted by God Himself, to show that they came directly from His hand.

The fourth stroke consisted of swarms of so-called dog-flies, which not only infested the houses, but "corrupted the land" by depositing everywhere

<sup>19</sup> The word does not properly mean "division" (as in our Authorized Version, 8:23), but, in the first place, deliverance, salvation, and also separation, distinction, and selection. Thus the Hebrew term as the reality connects the two ideas of salvation and separation.

their eggs. This "plague" (Psalm 78:45) is to this day most troublesome, painful, and even dangerous, as these animals fasten upon every uncovered surface, especially the eyelids and comers of the eyes, and their bites cause severe inflammation. It was announced to Pharaoh, as he went to the river early in the morning (8:20), as has been suggested, probably "with a procession, in order to open the solemn festival which was held one hundred and twenty days after the first rise" of the Nile (i.e. about the end of October or early in November). Although it wrung from Pharaoh consent for the people to go, yet on its removal, "he hardened his heart at this time also" - perhaps because in this and the next plague he did not see the instrumentality of Moses, and therefore fell back upon the theory of the magicians about "the finger of Elohim." The fifth stroke was a very grievous murrain (not uncommon in Egypt, which has been supposed to have been of the same kind as the "cattle-plague" in our own country, only far more extensive. But although Pharaoh ascertained, by special inquiry, that Israel had been exempted from this plague, his heart was hardened.

The sixth stroke was again made to descend by the instrumentality of Moses and Aaron. As the third in the second series, it came without any warning to the king. Moses and Aaron were directed to take "ashes of the furnace" - probably in reference to the great buildings and pyramids in which Egypt took such pride - and to "sprinkle it up towards heaven; and it became a boil breaking forth with blains upon man and upon beast" (9:10). Such "burning turnouts breaking into pustulous ulcers," but exclusively confined to man, are not uncommon in the valley of the Nile. <sup>20</sup> Even the magicians seem now to have yielded (ver. 11), but the judgment of hardening had already come upon Pharaoh.

The sixth plague had struck not only the pride and the possessions of the Egyptians, but their persons. But the three which now followed in rapid succession, stroke upon stroke, were far more terrible than any that had preceded, and indeed

<sup>20</sup> A modern writer has supposed them to have been the black-looking foul ulcers symbolized by the black, rusty ashes of the furnaces.



represented "all" God's "plagues" (ver. 14). They were ushered in by a most solemn warning, unheeded by him who was nigh unto destruction (vers. 15-18). The reason why God did not at once destroy Pharaoh and his people is thus stated by the Lord Himself:

(Exodus 9:15, 16) "For now if I had stretched forth My hand and smitten thee and thy people with the pestilence, then hadst thou been cut off from the earth. But now, in very deed for this cause have I let thee stand (made thee stand, raised thee up), (Romans 9:17) for to show in thee My power (perhaps, to let thee see or experience it - this is the first reason; the second) and that My Name may be declared throughout all the earth."

That this actually was the result we gather from Exodus 15:14. Nay, the tidings spread not only among the Arabs, but long afterwards among the Greeks and Romans, and finally, through the Gospel, among all nations of the earth.

Only one day for thought and repentance was granted to Pharaoh (9:18) before the seventh stroke descended. It consisted of such hail as had never been seen in Egypt, mingled with thunder and fiery lightning. The cattle in Egypt are left out to graze from January to April, and such of the Egyptians as gave heed to the warning of Moses withdrew their cattle, and servants into shelter, and so escaped the consequences; the rest suffered loss of men and beasts. That some "among the servants of Pharaoh" "feared the word of Jehovah" (9:20) affords evidence of the spiritual effect of these "strokes." Indeed Pharaoh himself now owned, "I have sinned this time" (ver. 27). But this very limitation, and the hardening of his heart when the calamity ceased, show that his was only the fear of consequences, and, as Moses had said, "that ye will not yet fear Jehovah Elohim" (ver. 30).

A very decided advance is to be marked in connection with the eighth stroke. For Moses and Aaron, on the ground of Pharaoh's former confession of sin, brought this message from God to him: "How long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before Me?" (Exodus 10:3)

Similarly, "Pharaoh's servants," warned by previous judgments, now expostulated with the king (10:7), and he himself seemed willing to let

the male Israelites go for a short season, provided they left their families and flocks behind. On the other hand, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart had also so far advanced, that, on Moses' refusal to submit to conditions, the king burst into such daring taunts as (vers. 10, 11): "So be it! Jehovah be with you as I will let go you and your little ones. Look! for evil is before your faces" (i.e. your intentions are evil; or, perhaps, it may be rendered. See to it! for beware, danger is before you). "Not so! Go then, ye men, for that ye are seeking" (the language evidently ironical). And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence.

And thus it came, that when "Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, Jehovah brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night; and when it was morning the east wind brought <sup>21</sup> the locusts." Once more they were natural means which the Lord used. For the plague of locusts was common in Egypt; yet even the heathen used to regard this as a special visitation of God. In Scripture it serves as the emblem of the last judgments coming upon our earth. (Revelation 9:3-10) This "plague," so much dreaded at all times, came now slowly, from far-off Arabia, <sup>22</sup> upon the doomed land, more grievous than such visitation had ever been known, and to the utter destruction of every green thing still left in Egypt - Goshen alone being again excepted. Pharaoh felt it, and for the first time not only confessed his sin, but asked forgiveness, and entreated that "this death" might be taken away (10:16, 17). Not for want of knowledge, then, did Pharaoh harden himself after that. Yet now also it was not repentance, but desire for removal of "this death," that had influenced Pharaoh. No sooner had his request been granted, than his rebellion returned.

Once more unannounced came the ninth stroke, more terrible than any that had preceded. A thick darkness covered the whole land, except Goshen.

<sup>21</sup> Or "carried." The storm literally carries the swarm of locusts.

<sup>22</sup> Generally, it is not the east but the south wind that brings the locusts, from Ethiopia or Libya. It was purposely from a long distance that they were sent, to show that Jehovah reigned everywhere.

There was this peculiar phenomenon about it, that, not only were the people unable to see each other, but "neither rose any from his place for three days." It was literally, as Scripture has it, a "darkness which might be felt" - the darkness of a great sand-storm, such as the Chamsin or south-west wind sometimes brings in early spring, only far more severe, intense, and long. Let us try to realize the scene. Suddenly and without warning would the Chamsin rise, The air, charged with electricity, draws up the fine dust and the coarser particles of sand till the light of the sun is hid, the heavens are covered as with a thick veil, and darkness deepens into such night that even artificial light is of no avail. And the floating dust and sand enter every apartment, pervade every pore, find their way even through closed windows and doors. Men and beasts make for any kind of shelter, seek refuge in cellars and out-of-the-way places from the terrible plague. And so, in utter darkness and suffering, three weary nights and long days pass, no one venturing to stir from his hiding. Once more, Pharaoh now summoned Moses. This time he would let all the people go, if only they would leave their flocks behind as pledge of their return. And when Moses refused the condition, the king

"said unto him, Get thee from me, take heed to thyself; see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die" (10:28).

It was a challenge which sounded not strange in Moses' ears, for before this interview God had informed him what would happen,<sup>23</sup> and directed that Israel should prepare to leave. And Moses now took up the king's challenge, and foretold how after those terrible three days darkness "at midnight," Jehovah Himself would "go out into the midst of Egypt," and smite every firstborn of man and beast. Then would rise through the night a great lamentation over the land, from the chamber of the palace, where Pharaoh's only son

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<sup>23</sup> The three first verses of Exodus 11 must have been spoken to Moses before his last interview with Pharaoh. Verse 1 should be rendered: "And Jehovah had said unto Moses," etc. They are inserted after 10:29, because they account for and explain the confident reply with which Moses met the challenge of Pharaoh. Evidently, 11:4, and what follows, form part of that reply of Moses to Pharaoh which begins in 10:29

<sup>24</sup> lay a-dying, to that of the hut where the lowliest maidservant watched the ebbing tide of her child's life.

But in Goshen all these three days was light and festive joy. For while thick darkness lay upon Egypt, the children of Israel, as directed by God, had already on the tenth of the month - four days before the great night of woe - selected their Paschal lambs, and were in waiting for their deliverance. And alike the darkness and the light were of Jehovah - the one symbolical of His judgments, the other of His favor.

## **II\_07 The Passover and its Ordinances - The Children of Israel leave EGYPT - Their First Resting-places - The Pillar of Cloud and of Fire - Pursuit of Pharaoh - Passage through the Red Sea -Destruction of Pharaoh and his Host - The Song "on the other side"**

### **Exodus 12:1 to 15:21**

EVERY ordinance had been given to Israel about the Paschal feast,<sup>25</sup> and observed by them. On the tenth day of the month, Abib (the month of ears, so called, because in it the ears of wheat first appear), or, as it was afterwards called, Nisan, (Esther 3:7; Nehemiah 2:1) the "Passover" sacrifice was chosen by each household.

This was four days before the "Passover" actually took place - most probably in remembrance of the prediction to Abraham, (Genesis 15:16) that "in the fourth generation" the children of Israel should come again to the land of Canaan. The sacrifice might be a lamb or a kid of goats,<sup>26</sup> but it must be "without blemish, a male of the first year." Each

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<sup>24</sup> If, as we have argued in this volume, the monarch under whom the Exodus took place was Thorhines II., it is remarkable that he left no son, but was succeeded by his widow; so that in that night Pharaoh's only son was slain with the firstborn of Egypt.

<sup>25</sup> Later Jewish ordinances distinguish between the so-called "Egyptian Passover" - that is as it was enjoined for the first night of its celebration - and the "Permanent Passover," as it was to be observed by Israel after their possession of the Land of Promise. The sacrificial lamb was to be offered "between the evenings" (Exodus 12:6, marginal rendering), that is, according to Jewish tradition, from the time the sun begins to decline to that of its full setting, say, between 3 and 6 o'clock P.M.

<sup>26</sup> The Hebrew word means either of the two. See Exodus 12:5; Deuteronomy 16:2.

lamb or kid should be just sufficient for the sacrificial meal of a company, so that if a family were too small, it should join with another.<sup>27</sup> The sacrifice was offered "between the evenings" by each head of the company, the blood caught in a basin, and some of it "struck" "on the two side-posts and the upper door-post of the houses" by means of "a branch of hyssop." The latter is not the hyssop with which we are familiar, but most probably the caper, which grows abundantly in Egypt, in the desert of Sinai, and in Palestine. In ancient times this plant was regarded as possessing cleansing properties. The direction, to sprinkle the entrance, meant that the blood was to be applied to the house itself, that is, to make atonement for it, and in a sense to convert it into an altar. Seeing this blood, Jehovah, when He passed through to smite the Egyptians, would "pass over the door," so that it would "not be granted the destroyer to come in" unto their dwellings. (Exodus 12:23) Thus the term "Passover," or Pascha, literally expresses the meaning and object of the ordinance.

While all around the destroyer laid waste every Egyptian household, each company within the blood-sprinkled houses of Israel was engaged in the sacrificial meal. This consisted of the Paschal lamb, and "unleavened bread with," or rather "upon, bitter herbs," as if in that solemn hour of judgment and deliverance they were to have set before them as their proper meal the symbol of all the bitterness of Egypt, and upon it the sacrificial lamb and unleavened bread to sweeten and to make of it a festive supper. For everything here was full of deepest meaning. The sacrificial lamb, whose sprinkled blood protected Israel, pointed to Him whose precious blood is the only safety of God's people; the hyssop (as in the cleansing of the leper, and of those polluted by death, and in Psalm 51:7) was the symbol of purification; and the unleavened bread that "of sincerity and truth," in the removal of the "old leaven" which, as the symbol of corruption, pointed to "the leaven of malice and wickedness." (1 Corinthians 5:7, 8) More than that, the spiritual teaching extended even to details. The lamb was to be "roast," neither

eaten "raw," or rather not properly cooked (as in the haste of leaving), nor yet "sodden with water" - the latter because nothing of it was to pass into the water, nor the water to mingle with it, the lamb and the lamb alone being the food of the sacrificial company. For a similar reason it was to be roasted and served up whole - complete, without break or division, not a bone of it being broken, (Exodus 12:46) just as not even a bone was broken of Him who died for us on the cross. (John 19:33, 36) And this undividedness of the Lamb pointed not only to the entire surrender of the Lord Jesus, but also to our undivided union and communion in and with Him. (1 Corinthians 10:17) So also none of this lamb was to be kept for another meal, but that which had not been used must be burnt. Lastly, those who gathered around this meal were not only all Israelites, but must all profess their faith in the coming deliverance; since they were to sit down to it with loins girded, with shoes on their feet and a staff in their hand, as it were, awaiting the signal of their redemption, and in readiness for departing from Egypt.

A nobler spectacle of a people's faith can scarcely be conceived than when, on receiving these ordinances, "the people bowed the head and worshipped" (12:27). Any attempt at description either of Israel's attitude or of the scenes witnessed when the Lord, passing through the land "about midnight," smote each firstborn from the only son of Pharaoh to the child of the maidservant and the captive, and even the firstborn of beasts, would only weaken the impression of the majestic silence of Scripture. Such things cannot be described - at least otherwise than by comparison with what is yet to follow. Suffice then, that it was a fit emblem of another "midnight," when the cry shall be heard: "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh." (Matthew 25:6) In that midnight hour did Jehovah execute "judgment against all the gods of Egypt," (Exodus 12:12) showing, as Calvin rightly remarks, how vain and false had been the worship of those who were now so powerless to help. That was also the night of Israel's birth as a nation "of their creation and adoption as the people of God." (Isaiah 43:15) Hence the very order of the year was now changed. The month of the Passover (Abib) became henceforth the first of the

<sup>27</sup> Later Jewish ordinances fixed the number of a company at a minimum of ten, and a maximum of twenty, persons.

year.<sup>28</sup> The Paschal supper was made a perpetual institution, with such new rules as to its future observance as would suit the people when settled in the land;<sup>29</sup> and its observance was to be followed by a "feast of unleavened bread," lasting for seven days, when all leaven should be purged out of their households.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, the fact that God had so set Israel apart in the Paschal night and redeemed them to Himself, was perpetuated in the injunction to "sanctify" unto the Lord "all the firstborn both of man and of beast." (Exodus 13:1-7) When at last this "stroke" descended upon Egypt, Pharaoh hastily called for Moses and Aaron. In that night of terror he dismissed the people unconditionally, only asking that, instead of the curse, a "blessing" might be left behind (12:32).

"And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people that they might send them out of the land in haste, for they said, We be all dead men." Ere the morning had broken, the children of Israel were on their march from Ramses, around which most of them had probably been congregated. Their "army" consisted in round numbers<sup>31</sup> of "600,000 on foot - men, beside children" (12:37), or, as we may compute it, with women and children, about two millions.

<sup>28</sup> The later Jews had a twofold computation of the year, - the ecclesiastical year, which began with the month, Abib, or Nisan, and by which all the festivals were arranged; and the civil year, which began in autumn, in the seventh month of the sacred year. In Egypt the year properly began with the summer equinox, when the Nile commenced to rise.

<sup>29</sup> The arrangement of Exodus 12, should be noted, vers. 1-14 contain the Divine directions to Moses for the observance of the first Passover; vers. 15-20 give instructions for the future celebration of the feast, enjoined later (ver. 17), but inserted here in their connection with the history; in vers. 21-27 Moses communicates the will of God to the people; while ver. 28 records the obedience of Israel.

<sup>30</sup> The Exodus brought Israel into a new life, Hence, all that was of the old, and sustained it, must be put away (1 Corinthians 5:8). To have eaten of leaven would have been to deny, as it were, this great fact. The feast of unleavened bread, which followed the Passover night, lasted seven days, both as commemorative of the creation of Israel and because the number seven is that of the covenant.

<sup>31</sup> About 600,000 on foot" (comp. Numbers 1:46; 3:39). "On foot," an expression used of an army; for Israel went out not as fugitives, but as an army in triumph

This represents a by no means incredible increase during the four hundred and thirty years that had elapsed since their settlement in Egypt,<sup>32</sup> even irrespective of the fact that, as Abraham had had three hundred and eighteen "trained servants born in his own 73 house," (Genesis 14:14) and therefore afterwards circumcised (Genesis 17:13), whom he could arm against the invaders of Sodom, so the sons of Jacob must have brought many with them who were afterwards incorporated in the nation.

With these two millions of Israelites also went up a mixed multitude of varied descent, drawn in the wake of God's people by the signs and wonders so lately witnessed - just as a mixed crowd still follows after every great spiritual movement, a source of hindrance rather than of help to it, (Numbers 11:4) ever continuing strangers, and at most only fit to act as "hewers of wood and drawers of water." (Deuteronomy 29:11) But a precious legacy of faith did Israel bear, when they took with them out of Egypt the bones of Joseph, (Exodus 13:19) which all those centuries had waited for the fulfillment of God's promise. As Calvin aptly writes: "In all those times of adversity the people could never have forgotten the promised redemption. For if, in their communings, the oath which Joseph had made their fathers swear had not been remembered, Moses could in no wise have been aware of it." Such a sight had never been witnessed in the land of Egypt as when the nation, so delivered, halted for their first night-quarters at Succoth, or, "booths." The locality of this and the following station, Etham, cannot be exactly ascertained; nor is this the place to discuss such questions. Succoth may have been fixed upon as the general rendezvous of the people, while at Etham they had reached "the edge of the wilderness," which divides Egypt from Palestine. The straight road would have brought them shortly into the land of the Philistines, face to face with a warlike race, against which even Egypt could often scarcely stand. Of course they would have

<sup>32</sup> Calculations have again and again been made to show the reasonableness of these numbers; and the question may indeed be considered as settled. Nor must we forget that a special blessing attached to Israel, in fulfillment of the promise, Genesis 46:3.



contested the advance of Israel. To such test God in His mercy would not expose a people so unprepared for it, as was Israel at that time. Accordingly, they were directed to "turn" southward, and march to "Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea," where they were to encamp.

Two events, as we understand it, marked Etham, the second stage of their journey. It was apparently here, at the edge of the wilderness, (Exodus 13:21) that Jehovah first "went before" His people "by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, to go by day and night," that is, to enable them at all times to march onward. In Exodus 13:17, 18, we read that "God (Elohim) led the people," but now Jehovah, as it were, took command (ver. 21),<sup>33</sup> and, by a sensible sign of His Presence, ensured their safety. This pillar was at the same time one "of fire and of the cloud" (14:24), "of light" and "of cloud and darkness" (ver. 20). Ordinarily, by day only the cloud was visible, but by night the fire, which the cloud had enwrapped, shone out. (Numbers 9:15, 16) In this cloud Jehovah was visibly present in the "Angel" of the covenant; (Exodus 14:19) there the glory of Jehovah appeared (16:10; 40:34; Numbers 16:42); thence He spoke to Moses and to Israel; and this was the Shechinah, or visible Presence, which afterwards rested upon the Most Holy Place. And this pledge and symbol of His visible Presence appears once more in the description of the last days, only then "upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion." (Isaiah 4:5)

Secondly, it was probably from Etham, as they turned southwards, that tidings were carried to Pharaoh, which made him hope that Israel had, by this sudden backward movement, "entangled" themselves as in a net, and would fall a ready prey to his trained army. (Exodus 14:2-4) Perhaps now also, for the first time, he realized that the people had "fled" (ver. 5) -not merely gone for a few days to offer sacrifice, as they might have done, close by Etham, but left entirely and forever. The sacred text does not necessarily imply that from Etham to

Pi-hahiroth there was only one day's march. Indeed, opinions as to the exact locality of each of the stages to the Red Sea<sup>34</sup> are still divided, though the general route is sufficiently ascertained. While Israel thus pursued their journey, Pharaoh quickly gathered his army, the principal strength of which lay in its "six hundred chosen chariots." Each of these was drawn by two fiery, trained horses, and contained two warriors, one bearing the shield and driving, the other fully armed. A most formidable array it would have been under any circumstances; much more so to an untrained multitude, encumbered with women and children, and dispirited by centuries of slavery to those very Egyptians, the flower of whose army they now saw before them.

It must have been as the rays of the setting sun were glinting upon the war chariots, that the Israelites first descried the approach of Pharaoh's army. It followed in their track, and came approaching them from the north. There was no escape in that direction. Eastward was the sea; to the west and south rose mountains. Flight was impossible; defense seemed madness. Once more the faith of Israel signally failed, and they broke into murmuring against Moses. But the Lord was faithful. What now took place was not only to be the final act of sovereign deliverance by God's arm alone, nor yet merely to serve ever afterwards as a memorial by which Israel's faith might be upheld, but also to teach, by the judgments upon Egypt, that Jehovah was a righteous and holy Judge.

There are times when even prayer seems unbelief, and only to go forward in calm assurance is duty. "Wherefore criest thou unto Me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." Yet this forward movement was to be made only after Moses had stretched the rod of God over the sea, and the Angel of the Lord gone behind the host, casting the light of the pillar upon Israel's path, while, with the darkness of the cloud, he kept Egypt apart from them. Then blew the "strong east wind all that night," as never it had swept across

<sup>33</sup> The expression is the more noteworthy, as, both on a monument and in one of the ancient Egyptian documents, the general is compared to "a flame in the darkness," "streaming in advance of his soldiers."

<sup>34</sup> In the Hebrew it is called "the sea of reeds," but in the Greek translation of the LXX, and in the New Testament, "the Red Sea." The name is differently derived either from the red coral in its waters, or from Edom, which means "red" - as it were, the sea of the red men, or Edomites.

those water before. They divided, and formed on each side a wall, between which Israel passed dry-shod.

The following extract from Palmer's *Desert of the Exodus* (vol. 1. p. 37) may be interesting: "A strong wind blowing from the east, at the moment of the setting in of the ebb-tide, might so drive back the waters that towards the sea they would be some feet higher than on the shore side. Such a phenomenon is frequently observed in lakes and inland seas; and if there were, as there would very probably be, at the head of the gulf, any inequality in the bed of the sea, or any chain of sand-banks dividing the upper part of the gulf into two basins, that portion might be blown dry, and a path very soon left with water on either side. As the parting of the sea was caused by an east wind, the sudden veering of this wind to the opposite quarter at the moment of the return tide would bring the waters back with unusual rapidity. This seems to have been actually the case, for we find that the waters returned, not with a sudden rush, overwhelming the Egyptians at once, but gradually, and at first, as we might expect, saturating the sand, so that 'it took off their chariot-wheels that they drove them heavily.' In the hurricane and darkness of the night this would naturally cause such a panic and confusion as to seriously retard them in their passage; but, in the meantime, the waters were too surely advancing upon them, and when morning broke, Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore? The verse last quoted seems to show conclusively that the wind did veer round to the west, for otherwise, with the east wind still blowing, the corpses of Pharaoh and his host would have been driven away from the Israelites, and thrown upon the opposite shore." Parallel instances are referred to by Dean Stanley (*Sinai and Palestine*, P. 34), notably that of the bed of the river Rhone being blown dry by a strong northwest wind.

When the host of Egypt reached the seashore, night had probably fallen, and the Israelites were far advanced on the dry bed of the sea. Their position would be seen by the fire from the cloud which threw its light upon the advancing multitude. To follow where they had dared to go, seemed dictated by military honor, and victory

within easy reach. Yet, read in the light of what was to follow, it sounds like Divine irony that "the Egyptians pursued and went in after them in the midst of the sea." And so the long night passed. The gray morning light was breaking on the other side of the waters, when a fiercer sun than that about to rise on the horizon east its glare upon the Egyptians. "Jehovah looked unto" them "through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians." It was the fire of His Divine Presence, bursting suddenly through the pillar of the cloud, which threw them into confusion and panic. The wheels of their chariots became clogged, the sand beneath them seemed to soften under the fiery glow, and they drove heavily. With that light from the fiery cloud, the conviction flashed upon them that it was Jehovah who fought for Israel and against them. They essayed immediate flight. But already Moses had, at God's command, once more stretched his hand over the sea. In that morning watch, the wind veered round; the waters returned, and Pharaoh, with the flower of his host, sank, buried beneath the waves. Thus, in the language of Scripture, "Jehovah shook off the Egyptians in the midst of the sea." (Exodus 14:27)

Incidental confirmations of this grand event are not wanting. Throughout the Old Testament, it is constantly appealed to, and forms, so to speak, the foundation on which God rests His claim upon His people. Local tradition also has preserved its memory. Nor has anything yet been urged to shake our faith in the narrative. Although the exact spot of the passage through the Red Sea is matter of discussion, yet all are agreed that it must have taken place near Suez, and that the conditions are such as to make it quite possible for the host of Israel to have safely crossed during that night. Moreover, it is a curious fact, illustrating the history of Pharaoh's overthrow, that, according to Egyptian documents, seventeen years elapsed after the death of Thothmes II (whom we regard as the Pharaoh of this narrative) before any Egyptian expedition was undertaken into the Peninsula of Sinai, and twenty-two years before any attempt was made to recover the power over Syria which Egypt seems to have lost. And thus, also, it was that Israel could safely pursue their march through



the wilderness, which had hitherto been subject to the Egyptians.

But Moses and the children of Israel sang on the other side of the sea a song of thanksgiving and triumph, which, repeated every Sabbath in the Temple,<sup>35</sup> when the drink-offering of the festive sacrifice was poured out, reminded Israel that to all time the kingdom was surrounded by the hostile powers of this world; that there must always be a contest between them; and that Jehovah would always Himself interpose to destroy His enemies and to deliver His people. Thus that great event is really not solitary, nor yet its hymn without an echo. For all times it has been a prophecy, a comfort, and a song of anticipated sure victory to the Church. And so at the last, they who stand on the "sea of glass mingled with fire," who have "gotten the victory," and have "the harps of God," "sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb."

**II\_08 The Wilderness of Shur - The Sinaitic Peninsula - Its Scenery and Vegetation - Its Capabilities of Supporting a Population -The Wells of Moses - Three Days March to Marah - Elim -Road to the Wilderness of Sin - Israel's Murmuring - The Miraculous Provision of the Quails - The Manna.**

**Exodus 15:22; 16**

WITH the song of triumph on the other side the sea, the first part of the Book of Exodus ends. Israel has now become a nation. God has made it such by a twofold deliverance. He has, so to speak, "created" it for Himself. It only remains that this new-born people of God shall be consecrated to Him at the mount. And the second part of Exodus describes their wilderness-journey to Sinai, and their consecration there unto God. In this also it may serve to us as the pattern of heavenly things on our passage through the wilderness to the mount.

<sup>35</sup> Tradition informs us that the "Song of Moses" was sung in sections (one for each Sabbath) in the Temple, at the close of the Sabbath-morning service. The Song of Moses consists of three stanzas (Exodus 15:2-5, 6-10, and 11-18), of which the first two show the power of Jehovah in the destruction of His enemies, while the third gives thanks for the result, in the calling of Israel to be the kingdom of God, and their possession of the promised inheritance.

As Israel looked in the morning light across the now quiet sea, into which Jehovah had so lately shaken the pursuers of His people, their past danger must have seemed to them greater than ever. Along that defile, the only practicable road, their enemies had followed them. Assuredly the sea was the only pathway of safety to them, and in that sea they had been baptized unto Moses, and unto Moses' God. And now, as they turned towards the wilderness, there seemed to stand before them, and to extend all along their line of vision, east and north, a low range of bare limestone hills, that bounded the prospect, rising like a wall. Accordingly they called this the wilderness of Shur, or of "the wall." (Exodus 15:22) This then was the wilderness, fresh, free, and undisputed! But this also was that "great and terrible wilderness," so full of terror, danger, and difficulty, (Deuteronomy 8:15; 32:10) through which they must now pass. Under the shadow of that mass of rocky peaks, along the dry torrent-beds which intersect them, through the unbroken stillness of that scenery, of which grandeur and desolateness are the characteristics, led their way. A befitting road to such a sanctuary as Sinai! But what contrast in all around to the Egypt they had left behind only a few hours!

When we think of the desert through which Israel journeyed, we must not picture to ourselves a large, flat, sandy tract, wholly incapable of cultivation. In fact it is in almost every particular quite the contrary. That tract of land which bears the name of the Peninsula of Sinai, extends between the Gulf of Suez on the west, and that of Akaba (or the Persian Gulf) on the east. Its configuration is heart-shaped, the broader part lying towards Palestine, the narrower, or apex, stretching southwards into the sea. It really consists of three distinct portions. The northern, called the Wilderness of Tih, or, "of the Wandering," is pebbly, high table-land, the prevailing color being that of the gray limestone. Next comes a broad belt of sandstone and yellow sand, the only one in the desert of the Exodus. To the south of it, in the apex of the peninsula, lies the true Sinaitic range.

This portion bears the name of the Tor, and consists in the north chiefly of red sandstone, and

in the center of red granite and green porphyry. The prevailing character of the scenery is that of an irregular mass of mountains, thrown together in wild confusion. The highest peak rises to about 9,000 feet. Between these wind what seem, and really are, torrent-beds, filled, perhaps, for a very short time in winter, but generally quite dry. These are called Wadies, and they form the highway through the wilderness. Here and there, where either a living spring rises, or the torrent has left its marks, or where the hand of man is at work, cultivated patches, fair and fruitful, are found; palm-trees spring up, even gardens and fields, and rich pasture ground. But, generally, the rocky mountain-sides are bare of all vegetation, and their bright coloring gives the scenery its peculiar character. The prevailing tints are red and green; but this is varied by what seems a purple, rose, or crimson-colored stream poured down the mountain side, while, occasionally, the green of the porphyry deepens into black. Over all this, unbroken silence prevails, so that the voice is heard in the pure air at extraordinary distances. Besides the cultivated or fruitful spots already mentioned, and tiny rock-flowers, and aromatic herbs, the vegetation of the wilderness consists chiefly of the caper-plant, the hyssop of the Bible, which springs from the clefts of the rocks and hangs down in gay festoons; the "thorn," a species of acacia; another species of the same tree, the Shittim-wood of Scripture, of which the framework of the Tabernacle was made; the white broom, or juniper of Scripture; and the tamarisk, which, at certain seasons of the year, produces the natural manna. This leads us to say, that it were a mistake to suppose that the wilderness offered no means of support to those who inhabited it. Even now it sustains a not inconsiderable population, and there is abundant evidence that, before neglect and ravages had brought it to its present state, it could, and did, support a very much larger number of people. There were always Egyptian colonies engaged in working its large copper, iron, and turquoise mines, and these settlers would have looked well to its springs and cultivated spots. Nor could the Israelites, any more than the modern Bedouin, have had difficulty in supporting, in the desert, their numerous herds and flocks. These would again supply them with milk and cheese,

and occasionally with meat. We know from Scripture that, at a later period, the Israelites were ready to buy food and water from the Edomites, (Deuteronomy 2:6) and they may have done so from passing caravans as well. Similarly, we gather from such passages as Leviticus 8:2, 26, 31; 9:4; 10:12; 24:5; Numbers 7:13, and others, that they must have had a supply of flour, either purchased, or of their own sowing and reaping, during their prolonged stay in certain localities, just as the modern Bedouin still cultivate what soil is fit for it.

Such was the wilderness on which Israel now entered. During the forty years that Moses had tended the flocks of Jethro, its wadies and peaks, its pastures and rocks must have become well known to him. Nor could the Israelites themselves have been quite ignorant of its character, considering the constant connection between Egypt and the desert. We are therefore the more disposed to attach credit to those explorers who have tried to ascertain what may have been the most likely route taken by the children of Israel. This has of late years been made the subject of investigation by scholars thoroughly qualified for the task. Indeed, a special professional survey has been made of the Desert of Sinai.<sup>36</sup> The result is, that most of the stations on the journey of Israel have been ascertained, while, in reference to the rest, great probability attaches to the opinion of the explorers.

The first camping-place was, no doubt, the modern Ayun Musa (Wells of Moses), about half an hour from the sea-shore. Even now the care of the foreign consuls has made this a most pleasant green and fresh summer retreat. One of the latest travelers has counted nineteen wells there, and the clumps of palm-trees afford a delightful shade. There is evidence that, at the time of Moses, the district was even more carefully cultivated than now, and its water-supply better attended to. Nor

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<sup>36</sup> A regular Ordnance Survey has been made, under the direction of Sir Henry James, R.E. by Capt. Wilson and Palmer, R.E. four noncommissioned officers of the Royal Engineers, the Rev. F. W. Holland, and Messrs. Wyatt and Palmer. The result has been published in a splendid folio volume, with maps and photographic illustrators, and an excellent introduction by Canon Williams.

is there any doubt as to the next stage in Israel's wilderness-journey. The accounts of travelers quite agree with the narrative of the Bible. Three days' journey over pebbly ground through desert wadies, and at last among bare white and black limestone hills, with nothing to relieve the eye except, in the distance, the "shur," or wall of rocky mountain which gives its name to the desert, would bring the weary, dispirited multitude to the modern Hawwarah, the "Marah" of the Bible. Worse than fatigue and depression now oppressed them, for they began to suffer from want of water. For three days they had not come upon any spring, and their own supplies must have been well-nigh exhausted. When arrived at Hawwarah they found indeed a pool, but, as the whole soil is impregnated with niter, the water was bitter (Marah) and unfit for use. Luther aptly remarks that, when our provision ceases, our faith is wont to come to an end. It was so here. The circumstances seemed indeed hopeless. The spring of Hawwarah is still considered the worst on the whole road to Sinai, and no means have ever been suggested to make its waters drinkable. But God stilled the murmuring of the people, and met their wants by a miraculous interposition. Moses was shown a tree which he was to cast into the water, and it became sweet. Whether or not it was the thorny shrub which grows so profusely at Hawwarah, is of little importance. The help came directly from heaven, and the lesson was twofold.

"There He made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there He proved them." (Exodus 15:25)

The "statute," or principle, and "the ordinance," or fight, was this, that in all seasons of need and seeming impossibility the Lord would send deliverance straight from above, and that Israel might expect this during their wilderness-journey. This "statute" is, for all times, the principle of God's guidance, and this "ordinance" the right or privilege of our heavenly citizenship. But He also ever "proves" us by this, that the enjoyment of our right and privilege is made to depend upon a constant exercise of faith.

From Hawwarah, or Marah, a short march would bring Israel to a sweet and fertile spot, now known as Waddy Gharandel, the Elim of Scripture,

"where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm-trees; and they encamped there by the waters." This spot was suitable for a more lengthened encampment. In point of fact, we find that quite a month passed before their next stage in the wilderness of Sin. (Exodus 16:1) Even now this valley, watered by a perennial stream, has rich pasturage for cattle, and many shrubs and trees. Here, and in the neighborhood, the flocks and herds would find good sustenance, and the people rest. Leaving Elim, the character of the scenery changes. Instead of dreary level plains of sand, as hitherto, we are now entering among the mountains, and the bright green of the caper-plant forms a striking contrast to the red sandstone of the rocks. Hitherto the route of Israel had been directly southward, and in pursuing it, they had successively skirted the Tih, and near Elim a belt of sand. But now the host was to enter on the Sinaitic range itself. From Numbers 33:10, we know that from Elim their journey first brought them again to the shore of the "Sea of Weeds." The road which they would follow would be from Wady Gharandel through the Wady Taiyebah, in a south westerly direction. Here the sandstone again gives place to chalk hills and rocks. Where the road descends to the sea (at Ras Abu Zenimeh) it would touch, probably, the most dreary, flat, and desolate place in the whole wilderness. This spot was the next camping-ground of the children of Israel after Elim. From the shore of the Red Sea the next halting-place brought them into the Wilderness of Sin itself. (Numbers 33:11) That name applies to the whole extensive sandy plain, which runs along the shore of the Red Sea, from the camping-place of Israel to the southern end of the Sinaitic Peninsula.<sup>37</sup> On leaving the Wilderness of Sin, (Numbers 33:12-14) we read of two stations, Dophkah and, Alush, before the Israelites reached Rephidim. The Wilderness of

<sup>37</sup> From the Wady Gharandel two roads lead to Sinai, the so-called upper and the lower. Each of these has been ably and learnedly represented as that followed by the Children of Israel. After considerable research and consideration, we have arrived at the conclusion that the balance of evidence is decidedly in favor of the lower road, which, accordingly, has been described in the text. This conclusion has also been unanimously adopted by the Scientific Ordnance Survey Expedition, which investigated the question on the spot. It is of importance for the localization of Rephidim.

Sin, the modern El Markha, is a dreary, desolate tract, which obtains its name from a long ridge of white chalk hills.

In this inhospitable desert, the provisions which Israel had brought from Egypt, and which had now lasted a month, began to fail. Behind them, just above the range of chalk cliffs, they would see, in the distance, the purple streaks of those granite mountains which form the proper Sinaitic group. To the west lay the sea, and across it, in the dim mist, they could just descry the rich and fertile Egypt, which they had forever left behind. Once more their unbelief broke forth. True, it was only against Moses that their murmurs rose. But in reality their rebellion was against God. To show this, and thereby "to prove them, whether they would walk in the law of God or no," (Exodus 16:4) that is, follow Him implicitly, depending upon, and taking such provision as He sent, and under the conditions that He dispensed it, God would now miraculously supply their wants. Bread and meat would be given them, both directly sent from God, yet both so given that, while unbelief was inexcusable, it should still be possible. To show the more clearly that these dealings were from the Lord, they were bidden "come near before Jehovah," and "behold the glory of Jehovah," as it "appeared in the cloud." (Exodus 16:9, 10) That Presence ought to have prevented their murmuring, or rather changed it into prayer and praise. And so it always is, that, before God supplies our wants, He shows us that His presence had been near, and He reveals His glory. That Presence is in itself sufficient; for no good thing shall be wanting to them that trust in Him.

As evening gathered around the camp, the air became darkened. An extraordinary flight of quails, such as at that season of the year passes northward from the warmer regions of the interior, was over the camp. It is a not uncommon occurrence that, when wearied, these birds droop and settle down for rest, so as to be easily clubbed with sticks, and even caught by the hand. The miraculousness chiefly consisted in the extraordinary number, the seasonable arrival, and the peculiar circumstances under which these quails came. But greater wonder yet awaited them on the morrow. While passing through the Wady

Gharandel they might have observed that the tamarisk, when pricked by a small insect, exuded drops of white, sweet, honey-like substance, which melted in the sun. This was the natural manna (a name perhaps derived from the Egyptian), which, in certain districts, is found from the middle of May to about the end of July. But "can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" Can He command the clouds from above, and open the doors of heaven? Can He rain down manna upon them to eat? That would indeed be to give them of the corn of heaven! Truly, this were angels' food, the provision, direct from God, "the bread of heaven!" (Psalm 78:19-27; 105:40)

The Lord did this, and far more. As in the evening, He had "caused an east wind to blow in the heavens; and by His power He brought in the south wind; He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea, so, in the morning, as the dew that had lain rose in white vapor, and was carried towards the blue sky, there lay on the face of the ground "a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost." "It was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey." (Exodus 16:21)

The children of Israel said, Manna! What is that? It was manna, and yet it was not manna; not the manna which the wilderness produced, and yet in some respects like it; it was the manna from heaven, the bread which God gave them to eat. Thus it recalls our present condition. We are in the wilderness, yet not of the wilderness; our provision is like the wilderness food, yet not the wilderness manna; but, above all, it is sent us directly from God.

Such assuredly must have been the lessons which Israel was, and which we to this day are, called to learn. The very resemblance in some points of the natural to the heaven-sent manna would suggest a truth. But the difference between them was even greater and more patent than their likeness. On this point let there be no mistake. Israel could never have confounded the heaven-sent with the natural manna. The latter is seen in but a few districts of the desert, and only at certain seasons at most during three months; it is produced by the prick of an insect from the tamarisks; it is not the least like

coriander-seed; nor yet capable of being baked or seethed (16:23); and the largest produce for a whole year throughout the Peninsula amounts to about 700 lbs., and would therefore not have sufficed to feed the host of Israel even for one day, far less at all seasons and during all the years of their wanderings! And so, in measure, it is still with the provision of the believer. Even the "daily bread" by which our bodies are sustained, and for which we are taught to pray, is, as it were, manna sent us directly from heaven. Yet our provision looks to superficial observers as in so many respects like the ordinary manna, that they are apt to mistake it, and that even we ourselves in our unbelief too often forget the daily dispensation of our bread from heaven.

There is yet another point in which the miraculous provision of the manna, continued to Israel during all the forty years of their wilderness-journey, resembles what God's provision to us is intended to be. The manna was so dispensed that "he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating." (Exodus 16:18)

For this marks the true purpose of God's giving to us, whichever interpretation of the verse just quoted we adopt' whether we regard it as describing the final result of each man's work, that, however much or little he had gathered, it was found, when measured, just sufficient for his want; or understand it to mean that all threw into a common store what they had gathered, and that each took from it what he needed.

By two other provisions did God sanctify His daily gift. First, the manna came not on the Sabbath. The labor of the previous day provided sufficient to supply the wants of God's day of holy rest. But on ordinary days the labor of gathering the bread which God sent could not be dispensed with. What was kept from one day to the other only "bred worms and stank" (16:20). Not so on the Lord's day. This also was to be to them "a statute" and an "ordinance" of faith, that is, a principle of God's giving and a rule of their receiving. Secondly, "an omer full of manna" was to be "laid up before Jehovah" in a "golden pot." Together with "Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant," it was afterwards placed in

the Holiest of all, within the ark of the covenant, overshadowed by "the cherubim of glory." (Hebrews 9:4)

Thus, alike in the "rain of bread from heaven," in the ordinance of its ingathering, and in the Sabbath law of its sanctified use, did God prove Israel - even as He now proves us, whether we will "walk in His law or no." (Exodus 16:4)

## **II\_09 Rephidim - The Defeat of Amalek and its meaning - The Visit of Jethro and its symbolical import.**

### **Exodus 17 and 18**

A SWEET spot or grander scenery can scarcely be imagined than Wady Feiran. Here we are at last among those Sinaitic mountains which rise in such fantastic shapes and exhibit every variety of coloring. Following the windings of Wady Feiran we come upon a wide fertile plain, seemingly all shut in by mountains. This is Rephidim, the battle-field where Israel, fighting under the banner of Jehovah, defeated Amalek. The place is too full of interest to be cursorily passed by.

Just before reaching the plain of Rephidim, the children of Israel would, on their way from the Wilderness of Sin, pass a large, bare, outstanding rock. This, according to an Arab tradition, to which considerable probability attaches, is the rock which Moses smote, and whence the living water gushed. Now we know that, when Israel reached that spot, they must have been suffering from thirst, since, all the way from the Red Sea, these three days, they would not have passed a single spring, while their march in early May through that wilderness must have been peculiarly hot and weary. Again, it is quite certain that they must have passed by that rock, and under its shadow they would in all likelihood halt. For at that moment the valley of Rephidim before them with its living springs was held by Amalek, who, as the modern Bedouin would do in similar circumstances, had gathered around their wells and palms, waiting to attack the enemy as he came up thirsty, weary, and way-worn. Here then probably was the scene of the miracle of the smitten rock. Beyond it lay the battle-field of Rephidim.

Before following the Biblical narrative, let us try to realize the scene. Advancing from the rock just

described upon that broad plain, we seem to be in a sort of dreamy paradise, shut in by strange walls of mountains. As the traveler now sees Rephidim, many a winter's storm has carried desolation into it. For this is the region of sudden and terrific storms, when the waters pour in torrents down the granite mountains, and rush with wild roar into the wadies and valleys, carrying with them every living thing and all vegetation, uprooting palms, centuries old, and piling rocks and stones upon each other in desolate grandeur. At present the stillness of the camp at night is often broken by the dismal howl of wolves, which in winter prowl about in search of food, while in the morning the mark of the leopard's foot shows how near danger had been. But in the days of the Exodus Rephidim and its neighborhood were comparatively inhabited districts. Nothing, however, can have permanently changed the character of the scenery. Quite at the north of the valley are groves of palms, tamarisks and other trees, offering delicious shade. Here the voice of the bulbul is heard, and, sweeter still to the ear of the traveler, the murmur of living water. This beautiful tract, one of the most fertile in the peninsula, extends for miles along the valley. To the north, some 700 feet above the valley, rises a mountain (Jebel Tahuneh), which, not without much probability, is regarded as that on which Moses stood when lifting up to heaven his hand that held the rod, while in the valley itself Israel fought against Amalek. As a sort of background to it we have a huge basin of red rock, gneiss and porphyry, above which a tall mountain-peak towers in the far distance. Turning the other way and looking south, across the battle-field of Rephidim, the majestic Mount Serbal, one of the highest in the Peninsula (6,690 feet), bounds the horizon. On either side of it two valleys run down to Rephidim. Between them is a tumbled and chaotic mass of mountains of all colors and shapes. Lastly, far away to the south-east from where Moses stood, he must have descried through an opening among the hills, the blue range of Sinai.

But before us lies the highland valley of Rephidim itself, nearly 1,500 feet above the level of the sea. Here in close proximity, but in striking contrast to sweet groves and a running river, are all around fantastic rocks of gorgeous diversity of color,

white boulders, walls of most lovely pink porphyry, from the clefts of which herbs and flowers spring and wind, and gray and red rocks, over which it literally seems as if a roseate stream had been poured. In this spot was the fate of those who opposed the kingdom of God once and, viewing the event prophetically, forever decided. Wonderful things had Israel already experienced. The enemies of Jehovah had been overthrown in the Red Sea; the bitter waters of Marah been healed; and the wants of God's people supplied in the wilderness. But a greater miracle than any of these - at least one more palpable - was now to be witnessed, for the purpose of showing Israel that no situation could be so desperate but Jehovah would prove "a very present help in trouble." That this was intended to be for all time its meaning to Israel, appears from the name Massah and Meribah, temptation and chiding, given to the place, and from the after references to the event in Deuteronomy 6:16; Psalms 68:15; 105:41, and especially in Psalm 114:8. The admonition (Psalm 115:8) "Harden not your heart, as in Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tempted Me, proved Me, and saw My work," refers, however, primarily, to a later event, recorded in Numbers 20:2, and only secondarily to the occurrence at Rephidim. At the same time it is true, that when the children of Israel chode with Moses on account of the want of water in Rephidim, it was virtually a tempting of Jehovah. Judgment did not, however, at that time follow. Once more would God prove Himself, and prove the people. Moses was directed to take with him of the elders of Israel, and in their view to smite the rock in Horeb (that is, "dry," "parched"). God would stand there before him - to help and to vindicate His servant. And from the riven side of the parched rock living waters flowed - an emblem this of the "spiritual rock which followed them;" an emblem also to us - for "that Rock was Christ." (1 Corinthians 10:4)

It was probably while the advanced part of the host were witnessing the miracle of the Smitten Rock that Amalek fell upon the worn stragglers, "and smote the hindmost, - even all that were feeble," - when Israel was "faint and weary." (Deuteronomy 25:18) It was a wicked deed, for Israel had in no way provoked the onset, and the



Amalekites were, as descendants of Esau, closely related to them. But there is yet deeper meaning attaching both to this contest and to its issue. For, first, we mark the record of God's solemn determination "utterly to put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven," (Exodus 17:14) and His proclamation of "war of Jehovah with Amalek from generation to generation" (17:16). Secondly, we have in connection with this the prophetic utterance of Balaam to this effect: (Numbers 24:20) "Amalek the first-fruits of the heathen" (the beginning of the Gentile power and hostility), "but his latter end even to destruction;" while, lastly, we notice the brief but deeply significant terms in which Scripture accounts for the cowardly attack of Amalek: (Deuteronomy 25:18) "he feared not God."

The contest of Amalek therefore must have been intended, not so much against Israel simply as a nation, as against Israel in their character as the people of God. It was the first attack of the kingdoms of this world upon the kingdom of God, and as such it is typical of all that have followed. Strange as it may sound, in such a contest God will not fight for Israel as at the Red Sea. Israel itself must also fight, though success will be granted only so long as their fight is carried on under the banner of God. That banner was the rod which Moses had received, and with which he was to perform miracles. This rod represented the wonder-working Presence of Jehovah with His people as their Shepherd, their Ruler and their Leader. Yet in the fight which Israel waged, it was not enough simply to stretch forth the rod as over the Red Sea. The hand that holds the rod must also be lifted up to heaven - the faith that holds the symbol of God's wonder-working presence must rise up to heaven and draw down in prayer the pledged blessing, to give success to Israel's efforts, and ensure victory to their arms. Thus we understand this history. Moses chose a band to fight against Amalek, placing it under the command of Hoshea, a prince of the tribe of Ephraim, (Numbers 13:8, 16; Deuteronomy 32:44) whose name, perhaps, from that very event, was changed to Joshua (Jehovah is help).

In the mean time Moses himself took his position on the top of a hill, with the rod of God in his

hand. So long as this rod was held up Israel prevailed, but when Moses' hands drooped from weariness, Amalek prevailed. Then Aaron and Hur - the latter a descendant of Judah, and the grandfather of Bezaleel, <sup>38</sup> who seems to have held among the laity a position akin to that of Aaron (Exodus 24:14) - stayed the hands of Moses until the going down of the sun, and the defeat of Amalek was complete.

This holding up of Moses' hands has been generally regarded as symbolical of prayer. But if that were all, it would be difficult to understand why it was absolutely needful to success that his hands should be always upheld, so that when they drooped, merely from bodily weariness, Amalek should have immediately prevailed. Moreover, it leaves unexplained the holding up of the rod towards heaven. In view of this difficulty it has been suggested by a recent commentator, that the object of holding up the hands was not prayer, but the uplifting of the God-given, wonder-working rod, as the banner of God, to which, while it waved above them, and only so long, Israel owed their victory. With this agrees the name of the memorial-altar, which Moses reared to perpetuate the event - Jehovah-nissi, "the Lord my banner." But neither does this explanation quite meet the statements of Scripture. Rather would we combine both the views mentioned. The rod which Moses held up was the banner of God - the symbol and the pledge of His presence and working; and he held it up, not over Israel, nor yet over their enemies, but towards heaven in prayer, to bring down that promised help in their actual contest. <sup>39</sup> And so it ever is.

Amalek opposes the advance of Israel; Israel must fight, but the victory is God's; Israel holds the rod of almighty power in the hand of faith; but that rod must ever be uplifted toward heaven in present

<sup>38</sup> 1 Chronicles 2:18, 19. According to Jewish tradition Hur was the husband of Miriam, Moses' sister. His father, Caleb, must not be confounded with Caleb, the son of Jephunneh.

<sup>39</sup> This view seems implied in Exodus 17:5, and explains the otherwise obscure words of ver. 16, which we literally render: "And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi; and he said, For the hand upon the throne of Jehovah! War with Amalek from generation to generation!"

application for the blessing secured by covenant-promise.

If the attack of Amalek represented the hostility of the world to the kingdom of God, the visit of Jethro, which followed Israel's victory, equally symbolized the opposite tendency. For Jethro came not only as Moses' father-in-law to bring back his wife and children - although even this would have expressed his faith in Jehovah and the covenant-people, - but he "rejoiced for all the goodness which Jehovah had done to Israel." More than that, he professed,

"Now I know that Jehovah is greater than all gods; for He has shown Himself great in the thing wherein they (the Egyptians) had dealt proudly against them (the Israelites)" (Exodus 18:11).

As this acknowledgment of God led Jethro to praise Him, so his praise found expression in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, after which Jethro sat down with Moses and Aaron, and the elders of Israel, to the sacrificial meal of fellowship with God and with each other. Thus Jethro may be regarded as a kind of first fruits unto God from among the Gentiles, and his homage as an anticipating fulfillment of the promise; (Isaiah 2:3) "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths."

A very marked advantage was immediately derived from the presence of Jethro. Just as after the conversion of the Gentiles to Christianity, the accumulated learning and research of heathenism were to be employed in the service of the Gospel, so here the experience of Jethro served in the outward arrangements of the people of God. Hitherto every case in dispute between the people had been brought to Moses himself for decision.

The consequence was, that Moses was not only in danger of "wearing away," from the heaviness of the work, but the people also (18:18), since the delay which necessarily ensued was most tedious, and might easily have induced them to take justice into their own hands. Now the advice which Jethro offered was to teach the people "ordinances and laws," and to "shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work they must do." Whatever questions arose to which the ordinances, laws, and directions, so taught them, would find a ready application, were to be considered "small matters," which might be left for decision to subordinate judges, whom Moses should "provide out of all the people - able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness" (ver. 21). Whatever came not within range of a mere application of these known laws were "great matters," which Moses should reserve for his own decision, or rather, "bring the causes unto God." And this wise advice was given so modestly and with such express acknowledgment that it only applied "if God command" him so, that Moses heard in it the gracious direction of God Himself. Nor would it be possible to imagine a more beautiful instance of the help which religion may derive from knowledge and experience, nor yet a more religious submission of this world's wisdom to the service and the will of God, than in the advice which Jethro gave, and the manner in which he expressed it. From Deuteronomy 1:12-18 we learn that Moses carried out the plan in the same spirit in which it was proposed. The election of the judges was made by the people themselves, and their appointment was guided, as well as their work directed, by the fear and the love of the Lord.