

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## Jericho.

THE capture of Jericho appealed to the popular imagination because of its name, and memory awakened with the story of its first overthrow, which has impressed us from our early childhood. Many of those who joyfully read the announcement in the daily papers were unaware that the remains of the Jericho with whose name they were familiar lie below the mounds of earth and stones near its chief fountain. All that may be seen to-day by the soldiers of our victorious army are two hotels, and a few miserable hovels occupied by the descendants of Bedawin slaves who have an inherent weakness of character and a strong disinclination to work, but in the appellation of their village of Erihâ a remnant of the old name survives. In the characteristics which serve for manhood the present inhabitants differ from the peasants of the Judean hills and the nomads of the Eastern desert, but not so much from those we naturally assume belonged to the ancient people who dwelt in the cities of the plain. A decadent race has followed a degenerate people. Their life is indescribable, but one of its principles may be illustrated by the following incident which came under my notice many years ago.

One of the men of Erihâ had agreed to give four asses as dowry for the daughter of another resident. The animals were duly delivered and the wedding celebrated. When the feast was over and the bride secured, her father proceeded to examine the dowry. His anger can better be imagined than described when he found that the asses he had received from his new son-in-law were those which he had himself stolen from a weary traveller a few days before the marriage.

There is nothing in Erihâ beyond its name and its fertile lands to connect it with Jericho, whose checkered history is as thrilling as any romance. Its geographical position attracts our attention now that our own troops occupy the site of the city associated with Joshua and that of Herod the Great. It lies fifteen miles from Jerusalem, thirty-three from Samaria, and less than thirty from the Hedjaz railway to Damascus on the Moab plateau. Roads leading to Jerusalem for Judea, to Bethel for Samaria, up the valley of the Jordan to Bethshan for Galilee, and the gorge of the Yarmuk towards

Bashan, and across the Jordan for another way to Damascus, indicate the importance of its situation.

The British General and his gallant army have won a strategical position of immense value after fighting over a mountainous region of such difficulty that it is scarcely possible to describe the obstacles encountered and overcome without appearing to depart from the realm of sober fact. Those who have read of the exploits of Jonathan and his armour bearer near Mickmash and the surprise created by their feat ought to be prepared for the more astonishing achievements of the soldiers of our King. Only those who have passed beyond the beaten track of the pilgrim and tourist can estimate the magnitude of the task before General Allenby's troops. Deep ravines with apparently inaccessible sides had to be crossed. Rugged mountains whose heights offer almost impregnable positions in modern warfare had to be reached, and held, by climbing their precipitous flanks over giant boulders and loose stones.

Rising from the fissure of Wady Kelt down which flows the brook Cherith, the last tall cliff burrowed with caves where hermits dwelt in the sweet consolation of being near the summit of the "exceeding high mountain," whence our Lord surveyed the Kingdoms of the world, is a suggestive feature when viewed from the Jericho plain, but in spite of tradition it cannot be the place where Jesus stood. It is below the mountains of the west. Another height, Kelat'er Rubad, further up the valley and across the Jordan, answers to the requirements of the situation.

General Allenby occupies a most favourable position for dealing with the enemy, but a victory commensurate with his opportunity will depend in a large measure on the number of men under his command, especially if his front be extended in the direction of the Belka (the Moab plateau). He is, however, likely to be joined by the troops of the King of the Hedjaz and the nomad horsemen who hate the Turks. With these reinforcements he will be able to separate the enemy forces and to move across the Jordan up Wady Hesban (Heshbon) and through Wady Seir to Amman (Rabbah of the children of Ammon), the headquarters of the Turkish army in Eastern Palestine which have already been bombed by our airmen.

Other armies have gathered on the plain before Jericho, but their battles recorded in the chronicles of the past sink into trifling adventures compared with the extent of the enterprise to which the British

forces are committed. As a fortified city Jericho never kept the enemy out of its streets. It fell before the Israelitish host that appeared at its gates, and it became the easy prey of succeeding invaders. Walls that resisted the onslaughts of the tribes of the Eastern desert failed when more formidable foes attacked them. Bacchides and the Syrians in the Maccabean wars, Pompey with the legions of Rome, Herod and his troops, and Vespasian with men flushed with victory, in turn sacked the place, but all except Herod approached the city from the plain. They never looked upon Jericho as having any military value, and its people were better able to run than fight ; in the eyes of the conquerors its worth lay in the economic advantages of the district.

Famous for its waters and its fertile soil, by the combination of fruitful earth and human industry the plain had attained a degree of prosperity surpassing all the regions of the Roman empire. Antony gave it to Cleopatra. In the propitious circumstances of an able administration when Herod ruled the land of Judea it became even more prosperous ; he paid tribute for it to the Egyptian Queen. After his death the Romans farmed the district round Jericho, and Zaccheus the publican in all probability held his office in connexion with the imperial revenue from its soil. From the dawn of history it was famed for its palm trees, and throughout the ages which followed, various accounts of the rich produce of its gardens have been handed down for us to read. The decay of enterprise and the desolation of the plain of Jericho in our time are due to the conditions caused by Turkish misrule. The climate has accelerated the decline, the long summer being too hot for health. Josephus wrote : " This plain is much burnt up in summer time, and by reason of the extraordinary heat contains a very unwholesome air." " The people are clothed in linen only, even when snow covers the rest of Judea." An old Arab geographer describes it as " the mouth of hell." Van de Velde, the explorer, on approaching the Ghor (the rift), the Arabic name of the Jordan valley, said : " The warm and fiery wind from the Ghor met us right in the face. . . . The air seemed to be on fire . . . my guides, as well as myself, thought we should die in this gigantic furnace." Having crossed the Ghor several times in the great heat of summer I can testify that this is an appropriate description.

A variety of plants and flowers still grow in the neighbourhood,

the thorny *nubbk* and giant cactus, and alkali shrubs thrive on the parched ground ; by the streams flowing at random from the spring the oleander sheds its crimson blossoms ; aromatic herbs and wild flowers fringe the water's edge and clothe the tall grass of the surrounding area, looking like an ocean of colour from the bare hills that flank the plain. Feathery tamarisks rise above the grass, bananas appear in cultivated spots, and dhurra fields spread over a portion of the valley lands.

Quail and francolin and sand grouse are found. Sunbirds, in size, and in the metallic lustre of their green and purple feathers, similar to the humming birds of tropical America, flit to and from the bushes ; other birds of brilliant plumage mingle with those of a more sombre hue. At night the bulbul sings in the thickets, innumerable frogs croak by the marshes, and the weird cry of the jackal comes from the village boundaries. Before the dawn the whirr of insect wakens what is left of sleeping nature and life resumes its sway.

When the Australians from their island in the southern sea first gazed on the wilderness of verdure encircling the few poor homes of Erihâ, these soldiers from the distant shore may have wondered whether the aboriginal inhabitants were in a better position to defend their homes ; whether the ancient city of the Canaanites really had defences so formidable as the Bible records describe. It is this element of surprise which has often caused men to suspect the accuracy of the Scriptures. The prevailing idea, arising from the frequent use of Bible names, that on the surface lies abundant proof of the Bible story, is not more reasonable than the severe alternative which rejects the sacred narrative because attention is not immediately arrested by evidence which will remove all doubt and prevent all contradiction. It has often been alleged that the anxiety for evidence has urged men to detect religious meaning in the most ordinary objects, and discover spiritual truth in every custom, of Bible Lands. On the other hand there have been men engaged in archæological pursuits whose scientific minds frustrate their discovery of evidence for confirming the statements of Scripture.

About eleven years ago Dr. Sellin, a German excavator, pierced the mounds over the old settlements. News of his operations caused quite a flutter amongst those who hoped the Bible story of the fall of Jericho would be true, and dreaded that it might be false. Why they should consider the foundation of their faith in the scriptures so

insecure none can tell, nor is there any reason for expecting every detail to be preserved intact through all the vicissitudes of centuries and the conflicts of nations. They waited in trepidation for the explorers' report. When it was first issued a sense of disappointment followed, which a subsequent account containing plans and illustrations did not remove.

Sir Charles Warren and Dr. Bliss had already shown that the mounds above Ain es Sultan, popularly regarded as Elisha's fountain, marked the site of the Jericho of the Old Testament. Dr. Sellin corroborated the evidence obtained by his predecessors. He traced about half the circumference of the city wall, and estimated the total area within its boundary at twelve acres, but only a portion of the site was examined ; it is therefore obvious that the results achieved, although considerable, cannot be regarded as conclusive. The excavator asserted that the walls were not entirely overthrown ; he was satisfied that they enclosed the high ground of the plain and followed the configuration of its surface. What was most disquieting related to the existence of the walls which we believed had been completely destroyed, but the report suggests that while they exhibited great engineering skill, they had not only been constructed at different times, but were raised by different builders. Illustrations accompanying the description of the walls showed the formidable nature of the fortifications as they would appear to desert warriors with their ordinary weapons. Structures within the fortress revealed the culture of the Canaanites, this appeared most plainly in the houses in the citadel where large stores of pottery, particularly lamps of the bowl and saucer shape, exhibited characteristics of the life of the time. These examples of art and manufacture indicated an association with Egypt rather than with Babylon. Another feature of archæological interest was reported which has not been observed in any other part of Palestine, a sudden interruption of the life of the city which occurred after its overthrow by the Israelites. Between its destruction and the venture of Hiel the Beth-elite (1 Kings xvi. 34), which may have been a reconstruction of the fortifications, the results of the conquest seem to have been more violent. This harmony between the excavations and the Old Testament history is important, nothing like it having been noticed elsewhere as a result of the Israelitish occupation ; it does not, however, imply that during the " interruption " the city had no

inhabitants, but a period of assimilation when the immigrant tribes slowly absorbed existing conditions into a new settlement. In some cases it was impossible to distinguish the Canaanite from the Israelite remains.

Jericho continued as a border city, or it would not have been mentioned in the list of the cities of Benjamin if its conquerors had levelled it to the ground and driven its people from their homes (Joshua xv. 1, 7; xviii. 12, 21). It was still "the city of palm trees" when Eglon, King of Moab, oppressed Israel (Judges iii. 16), and in the time of David residents occupied its quarters (2 Sam. x. 5). These incidental references show that the interruption mentioned in the report of the excavator was not so complete as the writer would lead us to believe, and it is extremely improbable that such a place would be left either by Moab or Israel without attention. A difference is clear, and likely, between the treatment the city received at the hands of the Israelites and their manner of dealing with other towns in their new home on the Mediterranean shore.

We cannot dissociate the curse against rebuilding, the construction of a fortress and the establishment of life on the old lines, from its religious significance. The cities of the plain have always been notorious for the iniquity of their people. There is nothing either in the history of the past or the life of the present in the favour of the inhabitants of this tropical area. The land is so fruitful very little labour is required to produce a rich harvest; the heat is so enervating there is little inclination to work; and when men are not called to struggle for existence, but enticed to rest, deterioration naturally follows. There is no record of any one having lived in Jericho who was worthy to be called a man, except Zaccheus the publican, and his manhood came through Christ. He was lost until Jesus found him. The inhabitants of Jericho are despised by all who know them. Only travellers ignorant of their sordid existence describe them as Bedawin. Some men of the desert use the Eastern side of the Jordan as their winter quarters. No Bedawin live in Jericho.

The city attained its height of grandeur in the reign of Herod the Great; it has reached its depth of degradation under Ottoman dominion. Having assumed a political and economic importance, it became the resort of all who courted the king's favour and who sought the voluptuous pleasures of a luxurious life. Of the palaces

and places of amusement built and maintained by Herod and his successor scarcely a trace remains. Glimpses of the life of the city are afforded us by various writers, Josephus being the most informing; what he tells us is suggestive, the knowledge obtained from him forms the outline of a scene of Oriental splendour that neither mind can grasp nor pen adequately describe. When in imagination we compare the magnificence of Herod's favourite abode with the squalor of Erihâ we are again reminded of the judgment of God. Lot looked down from the sterile heights of Canaan on to the plain of Jordan and found it well watered everywhere, even as the garden of the Lord, but it was not something outside of him on which he could gaze that determined his choice, but something within him; the garden of the Lord is profitable when cultivated by men of the Lord both for the life which now is and the life which is to come.

“In the most fruitful country of Judea,” “the waters afforded a sweeter nourishment than other waters do,” and when Herod ruled, “those most excellent gardens that are thick set with trees,” the balsam woods and palm groves, offered shade from the tropical heat; and dwellings suitable for the climate sheltered the people. While the King enjoyed the luxurious quarters of his winter palace he was not the man to neglect the plans ever forming in his mind for the nefarious schemes that marked his eventful career. The youthful high priest Aristobulus accepted his hospitality after a Feast of Tabernacles, and the old king and young priest “stood by the fish-ponds, of which there were large ones about the house”; “they went to cool themselves by bathing because it was a hot day”; and we are further informed by Josephus that “Herod behaved in a ridiculous manner.” His conduct concealed the plan already matured in his mind which he had devised for compassing the death of the high priest. Later in the day, at Herod's instigation, while Aristobulus sported in the ponds with other bathers, he was held under water and drowned. For the purpose of hiding his share in the murder, the king assumed an attitude of sorrow, publicly exhibited his grief, but all his ostentation failed to remove the suspicion attached to him. Herod also died in Jericho of a complication of disorders which, if we accept the testimony of the Jewish historian, revealed the nature of his evil life. When threatened with death, while the grim spectre halted on the threshold of the palace, he caused the

most illustrious men of Judea to be shut in the Hippodrome for slaughter when he died, so that the people would have to mourn. Before the soldiers knew that Herod was dead his daughter Salome and her husband released all whom the King had commanded to be slain ; the soldiers were told that he had altered his mind. The people were then gathered together in the amphitheatre, where Ptolemy, who was entrusted by the King with his signet ring, appeared before them " and spake of the happiness the King had attained." Archelaus, his son, became King in Jericho ; " he prepared his father's funeral, omitted nothing of magnificence therein, but brought out all the royal ornaments to augment the pomp of the deceased."

Let us hope that the entry of the British soldiers into the country will be the end of the Turkish dominion, and the dawn of a new era of prosperity and peace.

G. ROBINSON LEES.

