

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

The Jordan and its Associations.

III.

DEMONIACAL POSSESSION.

JUST at the widest part of the Lake of Gennesareth is a little village, occupying the site of Magdala, whence one of the Mary's is called Magdalene ; three miles to the south of it is Tiberias, from which the lake is named in St. John's Gospel. It is the only city now on its shores ; probably our Lord was never there. At the east side of the Lake, just at its head, is a locality about which there can be little doubt, that of the feeding of the five thousand : there is the desert mountain, some distance from Bethsaida, near the shore, for the people came in boats, and at its foot, " there was much grass " where the people could sit down. Dr. Adam Clarke, the learned Irish commentator, thinks that the grass was newly-mown, it was hay, and this circumstance marks out more particularly that the Passover was at hand. In Palestine the grass is ready for mowing in March ; and this miracle seems to have been wrought only a few days before the commencement of that festival (John vi. 4).

Opposite Magdala, at the widest part of the sea, is " Gergesa " (or Gadara), where the man possessed with the legion, and whom *no man* could tame, was *cured by Christ*. This was no mere aberration of the intellect, so common in our day, but a real *possession of the devil*. Christ did not speak to a disease, but to an individual—a person. " Hold thy peace, and come out of him " was Christ's command. Thank God, He can still deliver men " led captive." " For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy (bring to naught) the works of the devil." Some men to-day, in diabolic rage, and under some mad delusion, may be instigated by demoniacal possession ! A demon power would account for the inhuman hecatomb of sacred life seen in France !

THE POWER AND THE PEACE OF HIS PRESENCE.

Not only at Gadara, but everywhere on these shores, and on this water, the sense of One Gentle Presence Who walked, and taught, and spake as never man spake, is pre-eminently felt ; here He wrought miracles of power or mercy or beneficence ; here He

said, " 'Peace, be still,' and there was a great calm." Looking upon this circumscribed spot, should any ask again, " Whence then hath this man all these things? " we can simply reply, He was sent to be " the Way, the Truth and the Life," to give the gracious " Come unto Me " and sound the far-reaching " Go unto all," and the effects of that life and teaching, of that invitation and command, through the Spirit's power, are destined to be universal.

The length of the Sea of Galilee is about seventeen miles, and its average width about six miles, being nine at the widest point. The waters are fit to drink, and several kinds of fish are found in it. There are few if any boats on it at present, though Josephus tells us that in his time over 200 vessels were assembled at a harbour at the south-west point to operate against the Romans. The Jordan cannot be traced through the sea from end to end ; there is no current visible.

CROSSING THE JORDAN.

The crossing of the Jordan was always an event in the history of the Children of Israel. The crossing by the British troops in 1918 marks a new epoch in the history of Palestine. A most interesting description of how our resourceful and dauntless engineers and troops successfully crossed the Jordan, under General Allenby, was given in *The Times* of April 1, by its able Palestine correspondent, Mr. W. T. Massey. On a Friday morning three of London's strongest swimmers breasted the current which tumbled past them, but found it too strong. A punt was no sooner put into the stream than it was torn from the hands of the engineers launching it. General Allenby decided then to cross some miles lower down. At Wadi Kelt (valley of Achor) an officer and six men swam the river, towing a rope behind them. Rafts were made and by daylight 300 men were over ! Bridges were then built, and though the Turks shelled our troops, all got over, and Es Salt was taken and forty *Germans* and officers (!) captured. Crossing the Jordan is costly work !

Crossing the Jordan spiritually is an event of deepest significance. " He brought us out that He might bring us in." Out of darkness into light ; out of Egypt into Canaan ; out of bondage into liberty ; out of struggling into peace ; out of effort into rest. An address of remarkable power by the Rev. Charles Inwood,

F.R.G.S., was once delivered at Keswick, on spiritually crossing the Jordan, and all that this involved. At the praise meeting on the following Saturday morning the briefest and most comprehensive testimony we ever heard there was given by two young sisters, who stood up together and quietly said, "CLEAN OVER JORDAN"!

REMARKABLE CHARACTERISTICS.

The Jordan has many wonderful physical peculiarities. Its sinuosity is so great between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea—though the direct distance is only 70 miles—it traverses over 200 miles. Another remarkable feature is—the Sea of Galilee, being itself 312 feet below the Mediterranean, the Dead Sea is 1,316 feet below the same level—that the river in this part of its course falls over 1,000 feet! This depression of the Jordan has absolutely no parallel—it runs, as it were, in the bottom of a huge crevasse. In this descent there are twenty-seven threatening rapids, and where it enters the Dead Sea it is 540 feet in width, but only 3 feet deep! Being sunk down in such a gorge it has never had any important towns on its immediate banks, and is almost useless for irrigation. One can now quite understand how proud Naaman, whose spirit had to be humbled e'er he was exalted, should arrogantly exclaim, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Jordan?"

Between the Jordan and hills at either side rise several distinct terraces, some not more than 15 feet above the river, and half a mile wide. They are covered with trees and shrubs. Mr. Lynch, the American explorer, tells us that flowers he gathered here equalled in delicacy of form and tint any he had ever seen; here, too, the Oriental nightingale, with its brown breast, scarlet head and crimson wings, seeks shelter from the heat amidst the thicket of trees and shrubs.

TWO MEN OF PRAYER AND POWER.

Mahanaim marked the spot where Jacob divided his people and flocks, and saw the angelic vision. David crossed the fords of Jericho when he fled from Absalom, and ascended the heights till he came to Mahanaim; here the chiefs of the surrounding tribes brought him the produce of their rich lands (2 Sam. xvii. 27-29). Here he wrote that plaintive strain in the Forty-second Psalm—"From the Land of Jordan"—a psalm in which the Shepherd-Poet

expresses his thirst for the only One Who could satisfy it, and in which he also encourages his soul to hope in God, the health of his countenance. Here, too, was heard that bitter cry of distress, culminating in, "Would God, I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" The refuge that the trans-Jordanic hills afforded to David, they also afforded to great David's Greater Son. Thither our Lord probably retired after His Baptism, there He went also in that interval of danger which immediately preceded the end of His earthly course.

We have not space to dwell upon Jabesh, and its inhabitants, who so nobly remembered the debt of gratitude they owed to Saul, after the Israelite's most decisive defeat by the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. Succoth, too, we pass, though it has memories connected with Jacob, who crossed here on his return to Palestine. Gilead has much that invites our admiration. The most romantic character of the Old Testament—Elijah the Tishbite—was a native of Gilead. So unconscious of self, he is not One, but the voice of One crying in the wilderness; so consistent in purpose, so calm in danger, so marvellously successful—how was it? He was *wholly surrendered to his mission*, a great lover of prayer, as well as a man of faith! What would it not mean to-day if every preacher of the Gospel, and office-bearer in every church, were a modern Elijah; prayer and faith and His Word—the lever, the power and the fulcrum—permeating, and exhibited in, all organizations and money-raising! We shall meet Elijah again at Cherith. In this neighbourhood, too, Balaam and Moses ascended the hills. Balaam—still looking at earthly good—suddenly exclaims, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob," but Moses knew that "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, Who rideth upon the heaven in thy help." He knew, too, "The Eternal God is thy refuge," and so may we, amidst the clash of arms and the fierce assaults of all enemies of righteousness!

THE JORDAN AND THE RED SEA.

Just above Jericho, at the other side of the river, was Bethabara—the House of Passage. There was a considerable difference in one circumstance of the Israelites' passage of the Jordan and the crossing of the Red Sea; at the latter the waters were as a wall on the right hand and on the left; but in the Jordan the waters

were cut off very far up, at the city of Adam, that is, farther than the eye could reach, and the channel remained dry down to the Dead Sea. Many of our readers, in the light of to-day's wonderful events in Palestine, will be glad to join in Heber's prayer:—

“ O Thou their Guide, their Father and their Lord,
Loved for Thy mercies, for Thy power adored,
If at Thy Name the waves forgot their force,
And reflux Jordan sought his trembling source ;
If at Thy Name, like sheep the mountains fled,
And haughty Sinai bowed his marble head ;
To Israel's woes a pitying ear incline,
And raise from earth Thy long-neglected vine ! ”

REPROACH ROLLED AWAY.

Gilgal was about five miles from the Jordan. The Israelites encamped here after passing the Jordan. Upon this occasion, “The Lord said unto Joshua, This day have I *rolled* away the reproach of Egypt from off you : wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal.” The twelve stones taken out of Jordan were here set up as a memorial and were probably ranged in a *circle*, similar to the Druidical circles of ancient Britain. Eastern usages may thus be seen in Western lands. Here the Israelites eat the corn of the land, and here Manna ceased to fall. Here also Saul was anointed king.

Gilgal was some miles from the Jordan, and between it and Jericho was the forest of palm trees, so celebrated : this forest was eight miles in length. Long after the capture of Jericho it was the scene of a great festival. When David was brought back in triumph after Absalom's rebellion, we are told *all* Judah and one-half of Israel met him here to welcome him ! What place could be more suitable, for there was abundance of shade and water—two chief necessities. We could almost wish we had some particulars of this psalm of triumph ! Here, sons of the prophets of Bethel watched Elijah and Elisha go down to the Jordan, the former to return no more ! Here, where the former dropped his mantle, he, who came “ in the spirit and power of Elias,” took it up and came preaching and baptizing ; and lastly, but more blessed than all, here, too, He Who said, “ Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness,” was Himself baptized of John in Jordan !

TRUST TRIED, BUT TRIUMPHANT.

Thither also Christ retired when that message came to Him from the sisters in that much-loved abode at the back of Olivet.

How this fragrant story—in which we see faith tried, but faith triumphant—has brightened many a shadowed home, and comforted many a lonely heart. Faith sent the simple message, “Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick.” It was enough, and beautiful in its simplicity.

In vain the sisters looked across the valley to the “beyond Jordan,” but He came not! Thousands of Christian women to-day are experiencing much of the suspense those two lonely maidens suffered. When we are told He “abode two days still in the same place,” it *almost* seems as if He were indifferent or unsympathetic! The reply to their message, too, was the disappointing words, “This sickness is not unto death.” But days after came the question—“Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldst believe thou *shouldst see the glory of God?*” The Christ Who is the “Resurrection and the Life”

“Never comes too late, He knoweth what is best;
Vex not thyself in vain, until He cometh, rest.”

With this story before us, and even with all the facts and light and experiences of saints for nineteen hundred years to confirm our confidence in the love and power and wisdom of Christ, we wonder whether in similar dark days of suspense or sorrow our faith would stand out as triumphantly as that of those two noble women of action and contemplation, if similarly strained and tested?

It was on this last journey “up to Jerusalem” that at Jericho Bartimeus received his sight, and Zaccheus entertained our Lord. Jericho was planted and embellished by Herod, who died there, and Mark Anthony purchased its gardens for Cleopatra. The brook which was the principal source of its fertility comes down through a ravine, and is now recognized as Elijah’s brook Cherith. Down to it, too, came Naaman and his train, and he found that the waters of Jordan *were* better for him than Abana and Pharpar!

The taking of Jericho by General Allenby in March, 1918, was the taking of a very different place to that which fell before the sublime faith of Joshua and his obedient host, who walked round its walls thirteen times. The walls fell then, not by Tank or battering ram, but by the power of a “shout” uttered in reliance on a seemingly useless command!

We have no space left to speak of that wondrous sea where the

Jordan empties itself. *It receives, but never gives!* It is a Dead Sea! Useless!

Here, above, around, below,
 In mountain or in glen,
 Nor tree, nor plant, nor shrub, nor flower,
 Nor aught of vegetative power
 The wearied eye may ken;
 But all its rocks at random run—
 Black waves, bare crags and banks of stone!

RE-CROSSING THE JORDAN.

One pilgrim we must refer to ere we close this article. He is a connecting link between the Jordan and ourselves, and, with the exception of our Lord, the most striking personality in history. That typical, may we say model Jew, crossed the Jordan breathing out threatenings and slaughter against Christianity, but, thank God, he *re-crossed it*, to build up the faith which once he destroyed, as no other man ever did. His labours were in this very Gilead about which we have been writing. With what success he preached may be judged from the fact that Christian churches had become so numerous here in the fourth century there were thirty-nine bishoprics! He was the man who pre-eminently “combined grasp with vital flexibility in a degree which made him the prince of missionaries. Above all he was the missionary in the attitude in which he stood to his Gospel, and to men as his subjects.”

We do not know whether St. Paul ever visited these islands (Rom. xv. 24); probably he did not, but we do know that as he began in the Jordan so he ended his mission at Rome, that there he met captive Britons, and that they brought back with them the light of Christianity, which was never wholly extinguished in these lands. No “gloomy doubts” filled this man’s mind when he stood on “Jordan’s banks,” but as the evening of life draws near we hear the [triumphant utterance: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but *unto all them also that love His appearing.*” We thank him again for that last sentence!

“JERUSALEM A PRAISE IN THE EARTH.”

We have been dealing only with the Jordan, not with Palestine, but cannot close these rough sketches without saying, if righteous-

ness and liberty are to characterize the Holy Land, if it is to become a crown of glory and a royal diadem, two things will be requisite, if fatal cowardly blunders, like those made in connection with Khartoum College, and places nearer home, are not to be repeated. Britain must take up her responsibilities, and remember she has been "*put in trust with the Gospel,*" and never regard that Trust Deed and Book "as a scrap of paper," but use it, and preach it, to make disciples of all nations, going "to the Jew first," and "beginning at Jerusalem." We must see to it that in forming a *controlling government for Palestine*, neither philanthropic hand nor loosened tongue are tied by statutes or alliances such as would render us disloyal to the Great Emancipator. Unquestionably the future government of Palestine—like that of Ireland—will be a thorny problem! A writer in the *Spectator* thinks that—he does not include British Jews—if the Jewish associations now in Germany muster in the Holy Land as "uncontrolled Zionists" with their present proclivities, it would be a criminal folly!

British and American and Canadian Christians have now the marvellous privilege of offering afresh the prayer of faith for the land trodden by the sacred feet of the Master, until "this land that was desolate is become like the Garden of Eden. . . . I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." We want to see a spiritual Jordan overflowing its banks! The Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob hasten the time when it shall be widely and manifestly true: "All drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ." Never more than to-day, do wounded, trembling souls need that Christ, Who alone can save and satisfy, comfort and conquer!

If I still hold closely to Him,
 What hath He at last?
 "Sorrow vanquished, labour ended,
 Jordan past!"

J. T. BUDD.

