SAUL’S JOURNEY TO ZUPH.

1 Sam. ix. and x.

The wanderings of the hero “who, seeking asses, found a kingdom,” form one of the most curious puzzles in Scriptural topography, for the starting-point is unknown, the point to which he returned doubtful, and
the intermediate places, though noted with much apparent exactitude, have not been recognised as identical with any well-known or important sites. The following notes derived from the Survey may, however, prove interesting to those who have given attention to the subject:—

1. The starting-point was Saul's home. Kish, his father, was a Benjamite, and it seems almost certain that he must have inhabited Zelah, a Benjamite city (Josh. xviii. 28), for here we find later the "sepulchre of Kish," in which the bones of his descendants were interred (2 Sam. xxxi. 14).

We find, however, immediately afterwards, a town or a district known as Gibeah of Saul as being the home of the king. It may be, therefore, that this place, called Gaboath Saule by Josephus, is the starting-point. The question is too long to enter upon at present, but as it appears that Saul first passed through Mount Ephraim, the starting-point may be generally stated as towards the northern limits of the territory of Benjamin. The consecutive order of the list in the book of Joshua would seem perhaps to place Zelah (more properly translated Tza'la) in the northern part of the land of Benjamin, and it may perhaps be identified with a large ruin called Khirbet Sh'ab Salah, "ruin of the ridge of Zelah," the last word being a natural equivalent of the Hebrew Tzal'a. This place is only four miles north-west of Jeb'a (Geba of Benjamin), and there are strong arguments in favour of identifying Jeb'a with Gaboath Saule, which need not, however, be discussed here.

2. On leaving his home at Zelah, or Gibeah, Saul first passed through Mount Ephraim (ix. 4). According to Josephus (Antiq. vi. 4, 1), having first sought over the territory of his own tribe, he went over that of other tribes. This would seem to make his first direction northwards.

3. Leaving Mount Ephraim, Saul passes through the land of Shalisha (ix. 4). It is only natural to connect this name with that of Baal Shalisha or Beth Shalisha (2 Kings iv. 42), and this place may be fixed as at the present Sirista, thirteen miles north of Lydda, from entirely independent considerations. (See Quarterly Statement, April, 1876, p. 69.)

4. Leaving this district, Saul comes to the land of Shalim (or "foxes"). This might be identical with the "land of Shual" (of the fox), near Ophrah (1 Sam. xiii. 17); but this seems irreconcileable with the last indication, and the land of Shalim was not in the land of Benjamin (comp. verse 4, lower down), which the land of Shual evidently was. Gesenius, in giving the meaning of the word (S.V. Shalim), suggests a more probable identification, namely, that the territory of Shaalabim ("foxes"), a city of Dan (Josh. xix. 42), is here intended. This place has been fixed at Selbit, south of Lydda, which gives a direct journey southwards of about a day's duration.

5. Saul next enters the land of Yemeni ("Benjamites," A.V.), and passes through it. Selbit, it may be remarked, is not far from the western border of Benjamin, which would be crossed in journeying to Zuph if identified as below.

6. Saul arrives at the land of Zuph, the farthest point of his journey,
and here encounters Samuel at a certain city, the name of which is not given (ix. 5, 6).

The meaning of the word Zuph has not been determined with certainty, the Targum on the passage, however, connects the name with the root Zephah, meaning "to shine," and hence "to be conspicuous," whence come the words Zephathah, Zophim, Zephu, and Mizpeh. In other targentms the words Zophim and Mizpeh are used indiscriminately in speaking of one place, both words being applicable to a "watch-tower," or city in an elevated situation. Zuph was, however, the name of a man, and it is not impossible that the land of Zuph may have been named after him (1 Sam. i. 1). In the first case the city in the land of Zuph would possibly be Mizpeh, in the second it would be Bethlehem the home of Zuph. The former identification appears to me the more probable for the following reasons.

1st. That the Targum derives the word from the root Zephah.
2nd. That on the departure of Saul, Samuel immediately gathers Israel together in Mizpeh (x. 17).
3rd. That the city is evidently one of those visited by Samuel (see ix. 12), and cannot be Bethel or Gilgal (see 1 Sam. vii. 16).
4th. That placing Mizpeh near to Kirjath Jearim, the land of Zuph would be reached immediately on leaving the land of Benjamin. Mizpeh may be fixed as in this station on entirely different grounds. (See Quarterly Statement, July, 1876, p. 149.)

Zuph has already been fixed as in this neighbourhood (see Murray's new map); but the identification with Sobâ is open to the objection that there is no good authority for supposing the letters F and B ever to be confused.

The root Zephah is represented by two Arabic roots, Safa (whence Mesuffa, "a place of view"), meaning "bright, shining, conspicuous," and Shîf (whence the exclamation Shîf, "look"), having also the meaning, "shining, looking out, viewing." Thus the modern Khûrēt Shîfa represents the Hebrew Zophim or Mizpeh, with which I have proposed to identify it on account of its position near Ebenezer and Kirjath Jearim. The name Shîfa probably still denotes a district, for there is a hill called Ras Shîfa about two miles north of Khûrēt Shîfa. This district, I would suggest, may be the land of Zuph. There is, however, another site which might also claim to be identified as Zuph, viz., the village of Safa, ten miles west of Bethlehem; and this position, indeed, fits in yet better with the subsequent part of the journey.

There is only one valid objection to these views. Josephus gives the name of the city as Ramah. Hence it has been supposed to be Ramathaim Zophim, which is here intended. Ramathaim Zophim was, however, in Mount Ephraim, and so not far from Zelah, in which case it seems impossible that Saul on his return journey should ever arrive at Rachel's sepulchre.

There is no space here to discuss the value of this statement by Josephus. The whole of his account (Antiq. vi. 4) is shorter and less
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detailed than that in the Old Testament, and the order of the events differs. It will be generally allowed that the history of contemporary events given in the Wars and later books of the Antiquities, gives indications to be placed in quite a different category to those of the earlier books. The Survey gives many opportunities of forming a judgment as to the value of Josephus's descriptions in such cases as the sites of Herodium, Masada, and Jotopata. In some cases it seems impossible to reconcile Josephus with the Mishnic doctors, and in these cases the Talmud is often the better guide.

7. Leaving Samuel, Saul first arrives at "Rachel's sepulchre, in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah" (x. 2). Supposing this to be the modern Kubbet Rahil, near Bethlehem, which Saul might have reached in journeying to the main road along the watershed, two questions arise.

1st. How can this monument be called "in the border of Benjamin," being four miles south of that boundary in the territory of Judah?

2nd. Where was Zelzah? supposing it to be the name of a town, for no such name has been found anywhere near Bethlehem.

It is possible that the reading of the Vulgate, which renders Zelzah by the words "in meridie" (towards the south), gives the best explanation, and that we should read Rachel's sepulchre towards the south, either of Zuph, or of Saul's route, or of the border of Benjamin.

8. Supposing Saul to be returning to his own home, it is natural to suppose the plain of Tabor (x. 3) which follows to be the plain south of Jerusalem and north of Rachel's sepulchre, now called the Meidan.

9. The end of Saul's wanderings appears to be reached at a place called "the hill of God," where is the garrison of the Philistines (x. 5). This place, Gibeah-ha-Elohim in the Hebrew, appears to have been so called because it contained a "high place" (see verse 13).

In another verse it is called simply Gabatha ("the hill," A.V., verse 10), and Josephus also calls it Gabatha. It would seem that Saul's uncle lived here (verse 14), which would lead us to identify it with Gibeah of Saul. It was not improbably on the road to Gilgal where Saul next went, which would seem to place it at Geba of Benjamin, and it was a Philistine garrison, which points in the same direction, for immediately after we find Jonathan smiting "the garrison of the Philistines," which was in Geba (1 Sam. xiii. 3). After the great meeting at Mizpeh, we find that Saul "went home to Gibeah" (x. 26).

The outcome of these various expressions seems to point to Saul's return to Gibeah of Saul, and to the identity of this town with Geba of Benjamin. There are many independent arguments which lead to the identification of these two places as the modern Jeb'a, which may, however, be reserved for the present.

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