

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 *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

©

ARTICLE VIII.

BIBLICAL NOTES.

BY H. B. HACKETT, D.D., PROFESSOR IN NEWTON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

1. SITUATION OF HARAN.

A CONTROVERSY has recently sprung up respecting the situation of the patriarchal Haran, which is not without interest to students of the Bible. It seems that there is a Hārān el-Arwamād, a little village about four hours east of Damascus, on the border of the lake into which the Barada (Abana) flows. Dr. Beke, an English scholar and traveller, in his "Origines Biblicae" (published in 1834), threw out the idea that the scripture Haran was not in Mesopotamia as generally supposed, but must have been near Damascus. He now maintains, since the unexpected discovery of this Hārān between "Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus," that it must be the identical Haran (or Charran) of the Bible in Aram-Naharim, i.e., Aram of the two rivers (as rendered in the Septuagint, Mesopotamia, Gen. xxiv. 10; Deut. xxiii. 4). In 1861 Dr. Beke made a journey to Palestine, chiefly in order to examine this question on the ground. The argument on which he mainly relies, or at least the one that is likely to impress the reader most, is the fact that Laban in his pursuit of Jacob appears to have travelled from Haran to Gilead on the east of the Jordan in seven days (Gen. xxxi. 23), whereas the actual distance of Haran from Gilead is about three hundred geographical miles, and would make in that country an ordinary journey of fifteen or twenty days. An Arab tribe on its ordinary migrations moves from twelve to fifteen miles a day, and a caravan, from twenty to twenty-three miles a day. On the other hand, it is not a little remarkable that Dr. Beke himself went over the ground, step by step, between Hārān el-Arwamād and Gilead, and found the time to be five days, which proves to be very nearly the time that Laban was on the way before he overtook Jacob in Gilead.

It must be owned that the rapidity of Laban's pursuit from Haran is not a slight difficulty, and requires for its removal various suppositions which the scripture text may allow, but does not directly suggest. First, we may assume that Laban, taking with him only some of his sons or other near kindred ("his brothers," see Gen. xxxi. 23), was unencumbered with baggage or women and children, and hence moved with all the celerity of which Eastern travelling allows. One party was fleeing and the other pursuing. The chase was a close one, as all the language indicates. Jacob complains that Laban had "followed hotly" after him. The swift dromedaries would be brought into requisition, if the ordinary camels were not swift enough. The speed of these animals is such, says Sir Henry

Rawlinson (who has seen so much of the East), that they "consume but eight days in crossing the desert from Damascus to Baghdad, a distance of nearly five hundred miles." He thinks it unquestionable that Laban could have "travelled the entire distance from Haran to Gilead in seven days" (*Athenaeum*, April 19, 1862). For examples of the capacity of such camels for making long and rapid journeys, see the *Cyclopaedia of Useful Knowledge*, Vol. vi. p. 191.

Secondly, the expression (which is entirely correct for the Hebrew) that Laban's journey before coming up with Jacob was a "seven days' journey," is indefinite, and may include eight or nine days as well as seven. "Seven," as Gesenius states, is a round number, and stands in the Hebrew for any number less than ten." A week's time in this wider sense, would bring the distance still more easily within an expeditious traveller's reach.

But whatever may be thought of the possibility of Laban's making such a journey in such time, the difficulty in the case of Jacob would seem to be still greater, since, accompanied as he was with flocks and herds, and women and children, he must have travelled much more slowly. It may be replied to this statement, that the narrative, on closer examination, does not restrict us to the three days which passed before Laban became aware of Jacob's departure, added to the seven days which passed before he overtook Jacob in Gilead. It is very possible that Laban, on hearing so suddenly that Jacob had fled, was not in a situation to follow at once, but had preparations to make which would consume three or four days more; so as in reality to give Jacob the advantage of five or six days before he finally started in pursuit. It is altogether probable, too, that the wary Jacob adopted measures before setting out which would greatly accelerate his flight (see *Gen. xxxi. 20*). Mr. Porter, who is so familiar with Eastern life, has drawn out this suggestion in a form that appears not unreasonable. Jacob could quickly move his flocks down to the banks of the Euphrates, and send them across the river, without exciting suspicion, since then, as now, the flocks of the great proprietors roamed over a wide region (*Gen. xxxi. 1-3*). In like manner, before starting himself, he could have sent his wives and children across the river, and hurried them forward with all the despatch which at this day characterizes the Arab tribes fleeing before an enemy (*vs. 17-18*). All this might take place before Laban was aware of Jacob's purpose; and they were then at least three days distant from each other (*vs. 19-22*). The intervening region between the Euphrates and Gilead, a distance of two hundred and fifty miles, is a vast plain, with only one ridge of hills; and thus Jacob could now "march forward straight as an arrow." If, as supposed, his flock and family were already in advance, he could travel for the first two or three days at a very rapid pace. "Now I maintain," says this writer, "that any of the tribes of the desert would at this moment, under similar circumstances, accomplish the

distance in ten days, which is the shortest period we can, according to the scripture account, assign to the journey (vs. 22, 23). We must not judge of the capabilities of Arab women and children, flocks and herds, according to our Western ideas and experience" (See Athenaeum, May 22, 1862).

Dr. Beke's other incidental confirmations of his theory are less important. It is urged that unless Abraham was living near Damascus, he could not have had a servant in his household who was called "Eliezer of Damascus" (Gen. xv. 2). The answer to this is that the servant himself may possibly have been born there, and have wandered to the farther East before Abraham's migration; or more probably, may have sprung from a family that belonged originally to Damascus.¹ Mr. Porter illustrates this latter import of the expression from his own experience: "I knew well in Damascus two men, one called Ibrahim el-Haleby, 'Abraham of Aleppo'; and the other Elias el-Akka, 'Elias of Akka,' neither of whom had ever been in the town whose name he bore. Their ancestors had come from those towns; and that is all such expressions usually imply in the East, in Arabic as in Hebrew" (Athenaeum, Dec. 7, 1861).

The coincidence of the name proves nothing as to the identification in question. The name (if it be Arabic) means "arid, scorched," and refers no doubt to the Syrian Hârân, as being on the immediate confines of the desert. The affix Arwamâd, i.e. "columns," comes from five Ionic pillars, forty feet high, which appear among the mud houses of the village (see Porter's Hand-book, ii. p. 497).

Again, the inference from Acts vii. that Stephen opposes Charran to Mesopotamia in such a way as to imply that Charran lay outside the latter, is unnecessary, to say the least; for he may mean equally as well that Abraham was called twice in Mesopotamia, i.e. not only in the part of that province where Charran was known to be, but still earlier in the more northern part of it, known as "the land of the Chaldees," the original home and seat of the Abrahamic race. Not only so, but the latter must be Stephen's meaning, unless he differed from the Jews of his time, since both Philo and Josephus relate that Abraham was called thus twice in the land of his nativity and kindred, and in this view they followed the manifest implication of the Old Testament, as we see from Gen. xv. 7 and Neh. ix. 7 (compare Gen. xii. 1-4).

Dr. Beke found "flocks and sheep, and maidens drawing water at Hârân el-Arwamâd, and felt that he saw the scripture scene of Jacob's arrival, and of the presence of Rachel with "her father's sheep which she kept" re-enacted before his eyes. But this is an occurrence so common in Eastern villages at the present day, especially along the skirts of the desert, that it can hardly be said to distinguish one place from another.

But the reasons for the traditional opinion entirely outweigh those

¹ The "born in my house" of the A. V. (Gen. xv. 3) mistranslates the Hebrew, which means only that Eliezer belonged to Abraham's household.

against it. (a.) The city of Nabor or Haran (Gen. xxiv. 10) is certainly in Aram-Naharim, i.e. "Syria of the two rivers" (in the Auth. Ver., Mesopotamia). This expression occurs also in Deut. xxiii. 4 and Judges iii. 8, and implies a historic notoriety which answers perfectly to the Tigris and Euphrates, but not to rivers of such limited local importance as the Abana and Pharpar, streams of Damascus. (b.) Aram Dammeseek (the "Syria Damascena" of Pliny) is the appellation of southern Syria, (see 2 Sam. viii. 6 and Isa. vii. 8), and is a different region from Aram-Naharim, where Haran was. (c.) Jacob in going to Haran went to "the land of the people of the East" (Gen. xxiv. 1), which is not appropriate to so near a region as that of Damascus, and one almost north of Palestine, but is so to that beyond the Euphrates. In accordance with this, Balaam, who came from Aram-Naharim, speaks of himself as having been brought "out of the mountains of the East" (Deut. xxiii. 5; Numb. xxiii. 7). (d.) The river which Jacob crossed in his flight from Laban is termed נַחַל i.e., "the river," as the Euphrates is so often termed by way of eminence (Gen. xxxi. 21; Ex. xxiii. 33; Josh. xxiv. 3, 4, etc.). (e.) The ancient versions (the Targums, the Syriac and the Arabic Pentateuch) actually insert Euphrates in Gen. xxxi. 21, and thus show how familiar the authors were with the peculiar Hebrew mode of designating that river. (f.) The places associated with Haran, as Gozan, Rezeph, Eden (2 Kings xix. 12; Isa. xxxvi. 12) and Canneh (Ezek. xxvii. 23) point to the region of the Euphrates as the seat of this entire group of cities. (g.) Incidental allusions (as in Gen. xxiv. 4-8; xxviii. 20, 21) show that Haran was very far distant from Canaan, whereas Damascus is upon its very border. So too Josephus (Antt. i. 16, § 1) not only places Haran in Mesopotamia, but sets forth its great distance from Canaan, as making Eliezer's journey thither to procure a wife for Isaac, formidable and tedious in the highest degree. (h.) The living traditions connect Abraham's life in Haran with Mesopotamia, and not with Damascus. Mr. Ainsworth, who visited Hārān, says that the people there preserve the memory of the patriarch's history; they tell where he encamped, where he crossed the Euphrates, and how he and his herds found a resting-place at Berōea, now Aleppo.

2. GLORIOUS VIEW FROM NEBO.

It has been usually thought that the description given of the view which Moses had from Nebo, the top of Pisgah, just before his death, was one addressed to the imagination and not to the eye. Some of the points mentioned may have been seen, it is said, but the others were only suggested. Dean Stanley, among others, has placed the matter in this light. One reason for this impression has been that no summit of the Moab mountains, the Abarim, opposite Jericho, was known to furnish a prospect like that represented as visible from Nebo: "And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead unto Dan; and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and

Manasseh; and all the land of Judah unto the utmost sea (the Mediterranean); and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees unto Zoar" (Deut. xxxiv. 1-3). Hitherto but few travellers comparatively have gone into this trans-Jordanic region. It is surprising how little we have known from actual trial of the possibility of seeing with the natural eye the magnificent panorama which Moses is said to have seen, in his survey of the Promised Land from Nebo. But this question at length has been put to the test. Mr. Tristram, in his recent exploration of a part of the Belka (Land of Israel, 1851), ascended one of "the brows there overlooking the mouth of the Jordan, over against Jericho," from which he beheld a landscape which corresponds remarkably with the biblical representation.

It must be left to his own words to describe the scene: "The brow cannot be less than four thousand five hundred feet, so completely does it overlook the height of Hebron and of central Judea. To the eastward, as we turned round, the ridge seemed gently to slope for two or three miles, when a few small, ruin-clad 'tells' or hillocks (Heshbon, Matn, and others) broke the monotony of the outline; and then, sweeping forth, rolled in one vast, unbroken expanse, the goodly Belka — one boundless plain, stretching far into Arabia, till lost in the horizon — one waving ocean of corn and grass. Well may the Arabs boast, 'Thou canst not find a country like the Belka.' As the eye turned southwards toward the line of the ridge on which we were clustered, the peak of Jebel Shihân just stood out behind Jebel Attarus, which opened to reveal to us the situation of Kerak, though not its walls. Beyond and behind these, sharply rose Mounts Hor and Seir, and the rosy granite peaks of Arabia faded away into the distance toward Akabah. Still turning westward, in front of us, two or three lines of terraces reduced the height of the plateau, as it descended to the Dead Sea, the western outline of which we could trace in its full extent, from Usdom to Feshkah. It lay like a long strip of molten metal, with the sun mirrored on its surface, waving and undulating in its further edge, unseen in its eastern limits, as though poured from some deep cavern beneath our feet. There, almost in the centre of the line, a break in the ridge and a green spot below marked Engedi, the nest once of the Kenite, now of the wild goat. The fortress of Masada and jagged Shukif rose above the mountain-line, but still far below us, and lower, too, than the ridge of Hebron, which we could trace, as it lifted gradually from the southwest as far as Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The buildings of Jerusalem we could not see, though all the familiar points in the neighborhood were at once identified. This must have been from a slight haze or want of power in our glasses, as the point where we stood is certainly visible from the roof of the English Church at Jerusalem. There was the Mount of Olives, with the church at its top, the gap in the hills leading up from Jericho, and the rounded heights of Benjamin on its other side. Still

turning northward, the eye was riveted by the deep Ghôr, with the rich green islets of Ain Sullân and Ain Dak—bright twins, nestling, as it were, under the wall of Quarantania (the traditional scene of Christ's temptation). There, closer still, beneath us, had Israel's last camp extended in front of the green fringe which peeped forth from under the terraces, our foreground. The dark, sinuous bed of the Jordan, clearly defined near its mouth, was soon lost in dim haze. Then looking over it, the eye rested on Gerizim's rounded top; and, further still, opened the plain of Esdraelon, the shoulder of Carmel, or some other intervening height, just showing to the right of Gerizim; while the faint and distant bluish haze beyond it told us that there was the sea, the utmost sea. It seemed as if but a whiff were needed to brush off the haze and reveal it clearly. Northward again, rose the distinct outline of unmistakable Tabor, aided by which we could identify Gilboa and Jebel Duh. Snowy Hermon's top was mantled with cloud, and Lebanon's highest range must have been exactly shut behind it; but in front, due north of us, stretched in long line the dark forests of Ajlun, bold and undulating, with the steep sides of mountains here and there whitened by cliffs, terminating in Mount Gilead, behind Es-Salt. To the northeast the vast Hauran stretched beyond, filling in the horizon line to the Belka, between which and the (Baahan) there seems to be no natural line of separation. The tall range of Jebel Hauran, behind Bozrah, was distinctly visible."

Moses died in the full possession of his powers, as the historian informs us, and though he mentions as one of the proofs of this that the patriarch's "eye was not dim" at his advanced age, it is striking to observe that he mentions the fact immediately after describing this wide scene which Moses had compassed with his natural eye. Thus, as it were, without thinking of it, he has forestalled an objection which might be supposed to arise in the mind of the reader.

ARTICLE IX.

NOTICES OF RECENT GERMAN PUBLICATIONS.

FROM OUR GERMAN CORRESPONDENT.

BEGINNINGS OF REFORMATORY MOVEMENTS IN SPAIN, UNDER CHARLES V., exhibited from Original Documents of the Inquisition of Toledo.¹—Some years ago a number of folio volumes of original docu-

¹ Franzisca Hernandez und Frae Franzisco Ortiz: Anfänge reformatorischer Bewegungen in Spanien unter Kaiser Karl V. Aus originalacten des Inquisitionstribunals zu Toledo dargestellt. Von Dr. Edward Böhmer. Leipzig: H. Hassel; London: Asher and Co., Trübner and Co. 1865. Price, 2 thaler 20 sgr.