

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 Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

*SOME RELIGIOUS USAGES OF THE DHÎÂB
AND RUALA ARABS, AND THEIR
OLD TESTAMENT PARALLELS.*

OUR interview with the Dhiâb Arabs was quite accidental. In seeking to go from the Jisr-er-Rukḳâd, in the Ḥaurân, to Chisfin we lost our way, and, after eleven hours in the saddle, found ourselves near their encampment at el-Ḳasei-beh, in the Jaulân, about four and a half miles east of the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. The tribe derive their descent, as is common among the Arabs, from their alleged ancestor Dhiâb (wolves).¹ They are not nomads, but have permanent seats, though dwelling in tents. Near them was an encampment of the Ruala, a section of the great tribe of Aeneze, whose winter quarters are in the Nejd, in the Arabian Peninsula, and who spend their summers in the Ḥaurân and the Jaulân, separating into various encampments, and changing from place to place according to necessities of pasture and water. Tradition places the home of the hero of the Book of Job near Nawa, in the Ḥaurân.² The author could easily derive his scenic materials from some such district, where at evening one may see a procession of camels file past his tent for two hours. Without going into the Arabian Peninsula, one may get the true flavour of Arab life in the summer habitat of the Ruala in the Ḥaurân and the Jaulân.

At the encampment of the Dhiâb Arabs we learned the origin of the maḳâm which they had recently built to their saint and ancestor Dhiâb. Last spring cholera was raging at Tiberias, on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee. Instead of taking necessary hygienic precautions, they had

¹ For the employment of a plural as the name of a progenitor, cf. use of the dual Mizraim as the one who begat Ludim (Gen. x. 7).

² See Consul Wetzstein, in Delitzsch, *Das Buch Job*, Leipzig, 1876, *Das Hiobskloster in Haurân und das Land Uz*, pp. 551-604.

recourse, like other Arabs, as we had previously found, to their patron saint. Believing that evil as well as good are from God,¹ and considering Dhîâb more powerful than God,² they sought to secure his favour and protection by erecting to him a shrine out of rude basaltic stones, without any building, but with a wall around it. Each owner of a tent brought a white sheep, and made it go around the maḵâm once,³ said "God is great," cut its throat, and sprinkled its blood on the front wall. They also put some of the blood on the forehead of each boy. They asked the pardon of their sins, because they had not built him a maḵâm before, and expected forgiveness, so the cholera would not come to them.

Before they built the maḵâm they had the custom each spring that every shepherd should offer sacrifice. They take the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkle it on all the flock, so that "God may pass over it." Every owner of a firstborn male, whether calf, sheep or goat, on the day it is cast by its dam, should cut off a bit of its ear, to indicate that it is designated as a sacrifice,⁴ and when it is weaned should slay it.

Like other Arabs they kill a sacrifice for a tent, either when they pitch a new one for the first time,⁵ or after they

¹ Cf. *Primitive Semitic Religion To-day* (London, 1902), pp. 68, 69.

² The Dhîâb spoke of God as the source of the cholera. It is a common idea that the weli (saint) is more powerful than God. Miss Johnston, of the British Syrian Mission, Damascus, heard a very ignorant Druse woman say in response to the suggestion that something was by the power of God, "The power of God is (proceeds) from Saint John," *ḵudreh allâh min mâr Yuhanna*.

³ Wellhausen, *Reste Arabischen Heidentums* (Berlin, 1897), p. 109, writes: "Das wichtigste Stück des arabischen Cultus ist der Umgang um das Heiligtum, wobei sich Männer und Weiber sich beteiligten." In this case the sacrifices make the circuit of the sanctuary, sometimes three, seven, or even ten times.

⁴ This occurs often. For laws regulating the sacrifices of Moslems, see Matthews, *Mischat ul-Masabih* (Calcutta, 1809), vol. i., pp. 319-322, 632-635 Hamilton, *Hedaya* (London, 1800), vol. iv., pp. 76-84.

⁵ Sacrifices for caves and houses, see *Primitive Semitic Religion To-day*

have enlarged it. The shed blood is a redemption (*fedu*)¹ for the tent and for the cattle. Any one who does not slay a sacrifice will lose some one from the inhabitants of his tent, or his cattle or flocks would die. If they should not kill the sacrifice, God would destroy them.

The same day we visited the tent of one of the three sheiks of the Ruala, who are brothers, and who share equally in authority over the tribe. The sheik who received us had the appearance of a refined gentleman. His hands were small, his voice low, his features fine, his smile was pleasing. He insisted on our partaking of his hospitality, and finally had a bowl of dates, with Arab butter (*semn*) in the centre, brought for our refreshment. By partaking of this provision we were assured of the friendship of the tribe. In order that we might learn their customs we took to our encampment a man eighty years of age, who, on each birthday, since he was five, had cut a notch each year on a stick. In the summer of 1902 we also had interviews with members of the same tribe. The account which follows is a combination of three interviews—two held during the summer of 1902, and one during the summer of 1903. They agree substantially in the description of the same customs.

In 1902, at evening, we saw a great encampment near Nawa in the Haurân. The next morning all was in motion; tents were being taken down, and the country was full of camels and Arabs. As the Arabs were passing on to new camping-grounds we witnessed a singular spectacle. There were perhaps a dozen camels, scattered at intervals, with four perpendicular poles fastened to the back of the camel. On the top of these, perhaps ten or twelve feet from the ground, a canopy was fastened, and on the top of this

(London, 1902), pp. 224, 225; for tents and houses, cf. *Ursemitische Religion im Volksteben des heutigen Orients*, Leipzig (1903), pp. 39, 201, 216, 228, 243.

¹ For the use of the term *fedu*, "redemption," see *Primitive Semitic Religion*, pp. 178, 195, 197, 200, 202, 205, 206, 209, 210, 232.

canopy rode an Arab girl prostrate on her bosom. These were sisters of heroes, or of Arabs who had distinguished themselves in battle. No others are permitted to ride in this way. When an Arab brave rushes off for the fray he says, "I am the brother of so and so," mentioning the name of his sister.

When the Emir is about to engage in battle he sacrifices a sacrifice to Abu'z-Zuhûr. Before they slay it they lead it around the decorated camel, because it is the leader's camel, or that of the flag. Then they sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the merkab of the camel, a sort of canopy. Every tribe has one merkab; it is the one in which the sheik's daughter or sister rides and sings. She is put in the centre of the battle, as the beau ideal of Arab womanhood. She puts antimony on her eyelids (2 Kings ix. 30; Jer. iv. 30; Ezek. xxiii. 40),¹ makes herself handsome, perfumes her hair, and bares her bosom. Around this merkab the Arabs perform prodigies of valour. It is affirmed that such a tribe as has been compelled to surrender the sheik's sister or daughter may never send a girl into battle after such a capture.

They sacrifice to Abu'z-Zuhûr, that he may help them to get the victory over the enemy. The following lines show their faith in Abu'z-Zuhûr as a tribal war-god:—

Abu'z-Zuhûr is wont to march surely,
 For the success of those who put on their war-clothes;
 And through him they are terrible.
 In the time of battle their horses play finely,
 Under a party of Arabs who are praised.
 He who tastes the touch of thy spears,
 His mustache will become white,
 And his steed will turn back and flee away.

When ill or distressed they vow, each man according to

¹ Cf. Lane, *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London, 1896), pp. 52, 53.

his ability, a camel or a sheep. During the month Rajab¹ most of the people of the tribe sacrifice a sheep for the sake of preserving the flock from disease or from being stolen.

OLD TESTAMENT PARALLELS.

It seems certain that religious institutions, such as we find to-day among Syrians and Arabs, and which may be recognized in the Old Testament, go back to a prehistoric source,² which for convenience we call Semitic. In spite of the positive religion of pre-exilic Israel, of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, this prehistoric source may be detected in the institutions of the people as they may be seen at the present day. Professor Franz Delitzsch, years ago, when I was his pupil in Leipzig, recognized that sacrifice and other institutions had not been divinely revealed, but went back to more ancient foundations.³

In this article it is my object simply to trace the parallels afforded by the interviews with the Dhiâb and Ruala Arabs and the Old Testament.

1. Monolatry. This exists among the Dhiâb and the Ruala Arabs. Each tribe has practically adopted its ancestor as its tribal god. So Chemosh was the god of the Moabites and Milcom was the god of the Ammonites (1 Kings xi. 4-7). It seems too that monolatry existed in

¹ For a list of the Moslem months see Baedeker, *Syria and Palestine* (Leipzig, 1898), p. ciii.; for ragab, cf. Wellhausen, op. cit. pp. 97 f.

² Professor A. H. Sayce, writing from Cairo, December 14, 1903, in acknowledgment of the receipt of *Ursemitische Religion*, says: "I am not sure that you, too, do not make sufficient allowance for degeneracy, which has had quite as much influence, if not more, as 'development' in making man what he is to-day." On the other hand Schwally, in *Literarisches Centralblatt* (1903), cols. 1669-71, writes: "Alles was auf dem Gebiet dieser Bräuche weder dem Islam noch dem Christentum zugeschrieben werden kann, betrachtet Curtiss als ursemitisch. Das ist gewiss in vielen, ja wie Ref. glaubt, sogar in den meisten Fällen richtig."

³ Cf. the clear statement of this subject by W. Robertson Smith in his *Religion of the Semites*. All my researches during the past five years confirm this view.

ancient Israel, as is claimed by the critics¹ (cf. 1 Sam. xxvi. 19). Really the most important political event in opening the eyes of the Jews, as a people, to the transcendent character of Yahwe as the God of all the earth was His defeat as a national God. The monotheistic conception of Him by the people as a whole was as truly the result of the Babylonian exile as the recognition of the true character and mission of Christ came only after His crucifixion and resurrection (Luke xxiv. 25-27). The materials for a study of the development of a local to a tribal God still exist among the Arabs.

2. Each tribe, according to the belief of those who compose it, is descended from its divinity by natural generation. The Dhiáb (or "wolves" Arabs) are the children of their grandfather "wolves." Such physical descent from a tribal progenitor is almost a universal idea among the Arabs.² To the Israelite the idea that Yahwe could have children is utterly repugnant, but certain expressions may have been coloured by a physical conception of sonship among other Semites. A passage in point is Exodus iv. 22, 23, where Moses represents God as saying to Pharaoh: "Thus saith Yahwe, Israel is my son, my firstborn: and I have said, Let my son go, that he may serve me; and thou hast refused to let him go: behold I will slay thy son, thy firstborn." The spiritual conception of God as Father in the Old Testament (Hos. xi. 1; Jer. xxxi. 9) has been divinely evolved from the physical conception of the ancient Semites.

3. The tribal God is a war-god. The representation of

¹ *Ibid.* p. 37.

² This is in accordance with my observations, cf. *Die Gottheit als Erzeuger des Menschen in Ursemitische Religion*, pp. 117-127. Much new material might be added from my investigations during the summer of 1902, indicating that when women bathe in sacred fountains they receive power to conceive through the weli who resides in such waters; cf. too the *Physical Relation of Man to God in Primitive Semitic Religion To-Day*, pp. 112-123.

Abu'z-Zuhûr as helping the Ruala and giving them the victory over their enemies is a primitive conception, which was firmly maintained by the Israelites in its literal sense. Moses promises Israel that Yahwe will fight for them (Exod. xiv. 14a), Yahwe is represented as taking off the chariot wheels of the Egyptians (v. 25). He goes before Israel and fights for them (Deut. i. 30; iii. 22; xx. 4). In Psalm xxiv. 8c Yahwe is celebrated as "mighty in battle," and not only so, but the command is given: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the king of glory will come in" (v. 7). So among the Syrians to-day it is believed in some localities, that narrow gateways are lifted up, so that some sacred sheik may ride in.¹

4. War among the Ruala Arabs, as we have seen, is inaugurated by sacrifice. Its blood is sprinkled on the merkab of the camel. So war in Old Testament times seems to have been inaugurated by sacrifice. There is not merely a hint of this as in Micah iii. 5, in a term used regarding war. "And whoso putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare (*kiddeshu*) war against him," which is certainly consistent with the idea of sacrifice,² but there seem to be clear indications of such sacrifices in 1 Samuel vii. 7-9, where the Philistines are gathered together against Israel for battle. Israel begs Samuel to cry continually to Yahwe their God to save them out of the hand of the Philistines. Before the Israelites go into battle Samuel offers up a sucking lamb as a whole burnt offering unto Yahwe. He answers and terrifies the Philistines by thunder. Whether

¹ This interpretation was suggested to me by Professor J. Stewart Crawford, of the Syrian Protestant College, Beirut. I have observed confirmations of the idea that low gateways to sacred enclosures are miraculously lifted up when some "holy" man rides in.

² Cf. W. R. Smith, *Religion of the Semites*, pp. 382, 383, and Gesenius *Hebräische Handwörterbuch*, ed. Buhl, Leipzig, 895, p. 680, "den Kampf selbst, d. h. ihn unter religiösen Weihe anheben. (שׁוֹרֵף) Joel iv. 9; Micah iii. 5; Jer. vi. 4."

such sacrifices were common we cannot determine.¹ The immolation by Meshah, king of the Moabites, of his eldest son must be regarded as a sacrifice to Chemosh in his capacity as the god of war. The offering of a firstborn son is a reversion to the original type of human sacrifice, which the king adopted in his extremity, and which, as necessary, provoked great wrath against Israel who had made such an offering necessary (2 Kings iii. 27).

5. The tribal god is thought to have some special place of revelation. This is at his *maḳâm*. Thither sacrifices are usually brought, though not always.² The blood is sprinkled upon the shrine and is put upon the heads of the boys. There is, as has long been recognized, nothing original in the sacrifices of the ancient Israelites. Their ceremonies, under divine guidance, are simply the development of prehistoric usages which we find in force among Arabs and Syrians. The worship of Israelitish nomads is represented as being before Yahwe, whether at his altar (Exod. xx. 24 JE), or at His tent (Lev. i. 5, etc. P). As blood is sprinkled on the *maḳâm*, and is put on the foreheads of boys among the Dhiâb Arabs, so at the conclusion of the covenant half the blood is sprinkled on the altar and half on the people (Exod. xxiv. 4-6 JE). Here a basin is used; such a basin I saw at the shrine of Ḥamed el-Ḥudêfi.

6. Sin may consist in the neglect of some ritualistic observance. This was the case among the Dhiâb Arabs in their neglect to erect a *maḳâm* in honour of their ancestor. Sins of ignorance are of much the same sort in principle among the Dhiâb as those detailed in P (Lev. iv. 2, v. 15).

7. Shed blood, though repugnant to Islam and Judaism,

¹ W. R. Smith, *Ibid.* p. 383, note 1, and Schwally, *Kriegsaltertümer*, Leipzig, 1901, p. 51, quote Judg. vi. 19 f. 26; xx. 26; 1 Sam. xiii. 9 f., in support of the custom of such sacrifices among the ancient Israelites.

² All sacrifices for houses and tents and even those which are offered to some saint, where his shrine is far away, are offered at the dwelling of the one bringing the sacrifice.

is still imbedded from most ancient times in the life of the people, not only among Arabs and fellahîn, but also among Moslems of all sects, unless it be among the Metâwileh,¹ among most Christian sects,² and even among some Jews. During the annual festival at the lower shrine at Mount Carmel, known by the Jews as Eliyâhu, by the Christians as Mâr Eliâs, and by the Moslems as Chidr, the Jews bring sheep with their heads adorned with garlands inside the shrine, and ask Eliyâhu to accept the sacrifice from their hands.³

8. The firstling male of animals among the Dhiâb Arabs belongs to Dhiâb, so the firstling male among the Israelites belongs to Yahwe (Exod. xxxiv. 19 J; xiii. 12, 15 D; Num. iii. 13; xviii. 15 P, etc.). It is true that the reason assigned for this is that Yahwe slew all the firstborn of the Egyptians, and that therefore Israel should slaughter all the firstlings of beasts and redeem all the firstborn of men (Exod. xiii. 11-15). We are not to consider that this was a new custom which was first introduced by the Israelites at the command of God, but a prehistoric custom that had been in vogue among the Semites from a hoary antiquity, and which has been preserved by the Dhiâb Arabs.

9. The Israelitish account of the origin of firstling blood

¹ In the summer of 1903 I made investigations among the Metâwileh of Belâd Beshara, including Tyre and Jeba', and did not find any use of blood among them.

² The Maronites may form an exception, though they shed blood at the launching of ships and boats at Juneh, cf. *Ursemitische Religion*, p. xvi.

³ The Jews ordinarily deny that they may offer any sacrifices, because of the final destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem under Titus, but the spirit of primitive Semitism is potent among some of them, so that they shed sacrificial blood at the shrine of Eliyâhu. Two young men of the staff of instructors at the Protestant Syrian College in Beirût know of a Jewish student in the Preparatory Department, who had to give up his studies several months for want of funds, who was enabled to return because Jews at Safed paid him for "carrying their sins for them." The young Jew in reporting his good fortune said, "I knew I could not carry their sins, but I thought I might as well have the money as any one.

on the door-posts and lintels of houses is that, in connexion with the Passover festival, the Israelites were directed to put the blood of the Passover lamb on the door-posts and lintels, that Yahwe might see the blood and pass over the houses of the Israelites, when the plague was slaying the firstborn of the Egyptians (Exod. xii. 13 P). The passover festival is a Spring festival. So the Spring sacrifice of the Dhiâb is also a Spring festival. They sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice upon "all the flock, so that God may pass over the flock." In the same way the owner of every tent puts the blood of a victim on the forehead of every boy, so that he may be spared. In like manner the sacrifice for the tent, while the blood is not put on it among the Dhiâb, although it is so placed among the Ruala and many other tribes, is considered a sacrifice for it, so that none of the "dwellers need die." The inhabitants of Kerak, when they cultivate their fields and occupy a cave, offer sacrificial blood at the entrance,¹ the Arabs put blood on a tent when it is pitched for the first time,² and Syrians for new houses.³ The motive for such sacrifices, whether among Israelites, Syrians, or Arabs, is the same. It is that animals and men may suffer no harm. Is such blood primarily vicarious? It seems so. One animal dies that the rest may live, or an animal dies that a man may live. It may well be that the interpretation given by Arabs at Fik, east of the Sea of Galilee, is correct. If the flock becomes diseased, they take all of them and lead them around the maḵâm two or three times. The sheep or goat that goes nearest the maḵâm is used as a sacrifice. They slaughter it, and take some of the blood and put it on the backs of some of the sheep. It is sacrificed to the weli, and spots of blood on the back of the sheep show that they were

¹ *Ursemitische Religion*, p. 208.

² *Biblical World*, Chicago, 1904, p. 96.

³ *Ursemitische Religion*, p. 257.

vowed, and one of them was killed for the others, "one redeemed all," *waḥidah fadat el-kul*, and "her blood was made a cure," i.e., for the rest of the flock, *demha sar shifa*, or her "blood was made healing," reminding us of Isaiah liii. 5, "With his stripes we are healed."

We are not to look to the interpretation of natives in explanation of the significance of sacrifice, but their idea of vicarious death is sometimes startling; e.g., an Arab, about two hours from Ṭafīleh, ancient Tophel (Deut. i. 1), brought out the notion of vicarious suffering: "If you vow for a boy, you take a sheep and redeem him [i.e. the boy] . . . a spirit redeems a spirit: *nafs tafda 'an nafs*. Because I vowed this vow to you, oh Ḥudēfi, you will accept this offering for the safety of my son, and it is soul for soul: *nafs 'an nafs*; also, "I take your sin upon my neck," i.e., "I assume your guilt."¹ In all sacrifices where a man puts his hand on the head of the victim, and it is accepted to make atonement for him (Lev. i. 4 P), we seem to have the idea of vicarious death.

I present these two interviews and some Old Testament parallels that I may show what light falls from such survivals on the religious usages of ancient Israel. It may be said, "Have not these tribes derived their customs from a corrupted account of Israelitish institutions?" So it might appear at the first blush. But it is altogether unlikely, when we remember that some of these same customs are found under various forms, from one end of the country to the other, and among all sects, except Protestants, and are attested as existing among the ancient Babylonians.

¹ Cf. The EXPOSITOR, London, 1902, p. 458.