

# 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 Expository Times* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expository-times\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php)

pdfs are named: [Volume]\_[Issue]\_[1<sup>st</sup> page of article].pdf

of Theology in Maynooth are quite convinced that the Bible does contain errors.

What are they to do? What they do, and what they advise every other Catholic to do, is made perfectly clear by Dr. MacRory in this clear and candid article. They are to say that, properly speaking, the Bible itself does not contain errors, but that there have been errors in their interpretation of it. Does our Lord seem to say that the Pentateuch was written by Moses? We have misunderstood our Lord. He does not say so. He simply speaks in accordance with the received notions of His time.

But let us quote a complete paragraph. 'The Bible is inspired throughout, and it teaches no error. Does it follow from this that everything in the Bible is in conformity with facts, as they were or are? Is everything true in the same way? Is it equally true that God created all things, and that He did so in six days? That He punished

sin in a terrible manner in the days of Noah, and that He punished it by a deluge that was universal? That He answered the prayer of Joshua, and that He did so by causing the sun to stand? When we ask ourselves questions like these, we begin to realize that if the teaching of Scripture is always true, it is sometimes difficult to know what that teaching is; in other words, that the sense of Scripture is not always what seems to lie on the surface, and that we ought to be cautious lest we hastily attribute to God statements which neither He nor the sacred writer ever intended to be taken as literal truth.'

How far does this carry? Apparently it carries a good long way. Dr. MacRory names the leading scholars on the Biblical Commission appointed by the late Pope. They are not to be supposed to be the wildest of the critics of the Bible. Yet Dr. MacRory is quite certain that at least two of them, Lagrange and von Hummelauer, find legends or folk-tales in the earlier books of the Old Testament.

## Our Sixth Visit to Mount Sinai.

BY MRS. AGNES SMITH LEWIS, PHIL.DOC., LL.D., D.D., CAMBRIDGE.

THERE are now two ways of reaching the monastery of St. Catherine, which stands some 5000 feet above the sea-level in a narrow valley called Wadyed-Deyr, beneath the shadow of a steep shoulder of Jebel Mousa, the traditional Mount of the Law. The first way is what the monks call *διὰ ξηρᾶς*; that is to say, you cross from Suez to the Asian shore in a dhow, escorted by a shoal of big fishes, which may be either dolphins or sharks, and reach the little oasis called 'Uyûn Mousa, the 'Wells of Moses,' after a two hours' ride. The gardens of palm trees there belong to Mr. Athanasius, a store-keeper of Suez, who is also agent for the convent; and who can accommodate a passing traveller for one night, but does not undertake to supply him with food. There you bid civilization farewell, and start on an eight days' camel ride to the convent, through scenery which becomes ever grander and more interesting as you pass from the sandy plain

to the region of limestone, then to that of sandstone, and finally to the valleys hemmed in by the great granite mountains of Serbal and Sinai.

This path has the advantage of almost coinciding with that traversed by the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt; it is therefore the one which has been frequently described by travellers; but those who follow it will probably have hardships to contend with. The first two days, from the oasis of 'Uyûn Mousa to that of Wady Ghurundel, the supposed site of Elim, take you over a flat sandy plain, and amongst dreary sandhills where no water whatever can be procured, so that your Bedawîn escort are most unwilling to encamp more than one night on it, generally on a strip of little green plants which stretches across the plain from the mouth of Wady Sudr, the scene of the late Professor Palmer's capture. To ride twenty-five miles on each of these two days, as you must do,

is very trying to people who are mounting camels for the first time; and gives rise to quite unnecessary grumbling at your dragoman, who is in the hands of the Bedawin and cannot help himself in the matter. The plain is also frequently swept by furious winds and sand-storms; and anything more miserable than to spend a night when you can hardly get a wink of much-needed sleep because both tents and beds are as shaken reeds, it has seldom been my lot to experience. These storms have attacked us three times on our return journey to Suez.

The other way, that by Tor, was hardly practicable before the beginning of this century. Till that time it involved a voyage from Suez in a dhow, which might last from two to ten days, and was really not practicable for women. In 1895 Mrs. Gibson and I asked the Khedivial Steamship Company what would be their charge for making one of their boats from Suez to Jeddah stop and put us down at Tor. As they asked for £25, exclusive of our tickets, we went by land. In 1897 they agreed to do it for £5; and we were delighted to escape six long days on camel-back. We went by the Wady Hebrân, the Wady Islih being at that season too full of water to be passable. This involved one day's ride over a plain, a climb, partly on foot, of nearly 4000 feet on the afternoon of the second day, and on the third day a further climb of 1000 feet over the Nugh Hawa (Gap of the Winds), and across the plain called Er-Rahah (the Rest), which lies in front of the lowest but steepest peak of Sinai, the Râs Sufsafeh, which impresses all travellers with its exact correspondence with the narrative in Ex 19. We therefore approached the convent in the same direction as we had done when on the route from Suez. But we could not contrive to return by the same short way; partly because we were afraid of getting into quarantine through meeting the Mecca pilgrims, and partly because of the great uncertainty as to when one of the Company's steamers would touch at Tor. So we submitted to the old hardships and discomforts on the long path by Sarabit-el-Kadim, Ghurundel, and 'Uyûn Mousa.

When we revisited the monastery in 1902, we learned, to our great delight, that no extra payment to the Steamship Company would be needed, for the quarantine station had been developing, and steamboats were touching at Tor once a week. We

found that the station, though covering many acres of ground, has no necessary connexion either with the Tor monastery or with the village, having a landing pier of its own; and that we need not get into quarantine unless we particularly wished it. So we made an early start on our second day, and reached our tents in the Wady Solaf by daylight, instead of being benighted on the dark mountains, as in 1897. We also summoned up courage to return to Tor by the Wady Islih, and in no part of the world, not even in Switzerland, have we seen anything more grandly beautiful. Wady Hebrân and Wady Islih both lead up to Sinai by the steeper side of the range of mountains. There is a merry little rill of water in Hebrân, which forms pools, and glitters in the brilliant sunshine; but Islih holds a rushing torrent, which in several places hardly leaves room for you to pick your steps dryshod between it and the steep granite cliffs which wall it in. You must, of course, often descend from your camel, and I had once actually to refuse riding down a waterfall, although the owner of the animal seemed to wonder that I had any scruples about it.

It is not easy to describe the Wady Islih to readers who can hardly realize what the desert is. In some places it might be likened to the Gorge of Pfeffers, in Switzerland, stripped of its verdure; so narrow is it, and so majestic are the cliffs which hem it in. These cliffs are sometimes of grey granite, but sometimes of a bright rose colour, ever and anon scarred by a massive strip of dark trap-rock, or a slender one of white quartz. Sometimes the pass broadens, and for a mile or two you ride amongst waving shrubs, turf, and broom, and past little palm trees nestling beside some sheltering boulders. The path has lately been improved at the expense of the Egyptian Government. But from year to year it is never the same, for every winter rocks of all conceivable size tumble down on it from the mountain-tops. They block the stream, they destroy every device of man for bridging it; and in many places they hang poised above the traveller's head, threatening to crush him at any disturbance of their equilibrium. For the cliffs are ever disintegrated by the summer heat, and there is absolutely no vegetation to prevent or to impede the headlong descent of broken rocks into the valleys. I cannot tell the exact length of the pass, but it takes seven hours to traverse, either by camel or on foot.

On Wednesday, 7th February, we rode across the plain which lies between the range of mountains and the sea. The sand was in many places rippled exactly like waves. We ate our midday meal in a little square luncheon-tent, and were quite happy in realizing that God can furnish a table in the wilderness. But after riding farther for about half an hour, we began to feel chilly, and on looking towards the mountains we perceived that their summits were quite veiled in cloud; and the ominous words 'water,' 'rain,' occurred more than once in the speech of our Bedawîn escort. Not a drop had fallen in the whole peninsula for twelve months previously, and it really seemed as if we were about to march into a winter tempest. But beyond a smart shower that afternoon and next morning, nothing occurred to make us uncomfortable, the pink cliffs of the Wady Islih being all the more lovely when they are wet.

At five o'clock on Thursday we found our tents pitched on a terrace of hardened sand about fifteen feet above the floor of the valley. We had just sat down to dinner when rain began to fall in torrents. It continued all night, and made us not a little anxious; for we were protected from it by only two folds of canvas, and after a year's drought there was the possibility of it continuing for a week. We were kept awake by the almost ceaseless thud of water on the tent-roof, and tried vainly to imagine the misery of our poor ill-clad camel-drivers. Seldom have I watched more eagerly for daylight. This, when it came, offered no prospect of relief. For twenty-four hours more we lived in the midst of a flood. If the heavy clouds occasionally broke, it was only to show a dull, grey sky behind them. The mountains looked weird through the mist; and the wind blew a column of wood smoke down the valley from a fire of twigs wherewith the Bedawîn were consoling themselves. To our surprise, these men looked radiantly happy, even in their dripping garments. As the monk Paulos, who had travelled with us from Suez, explained, some of them had found shelter beneath an overhanging rock, and some in a cave at no great distance. But all personal misery was forgotten in the thought that this rain meant deliverance to themselves and their families from starvation. If a winter be completely dry, even the most sapless of desert plants must perish; there will be a dearth of fodder for sheep, goats, and camels. These good men, moreover, had got

the idea fixed in their minds that we had brought luck. 'You have,' they said, 'a green foot,' which means that the earth becomes green where you tread. For had not the first drops fallen as we entered the Wady Islih? A similar event had followed last winter after our friend Archbishop Porphyrius had ascended to the top of Jebel Mousa and had prayed for rain. They had called him El Matran el Mâter, 'the raining Bishop.'

On Friday afternoon, a few minutes' pause in the downpour enabled us to take a little stroll up the stony hill behind us, only to be driven back again to shelter. The sand floor of our tents was getting into a soppy condition, relieved occasionally by diggings in the trench outside, and it was not pleasant to reflect that we were at least six hours' ride from any substantial dwelling. We knew that the Wady Tarfa and the Wady Islih form the natural drainway of the district. Twice our bedroom tent nearly collapsed in a strong gust of wind. One of the Bedawîn came and cleared away all the stones from the path between the door of our sleeping tent and that of the dining one, without being told to do so. Evidently something might be made out of these people, if they had the opportunity of learning handicrafts. Our camel-drivers were taken out of the four different tribes who dwell in the Peninsula, and, as a consequence, they made four separate fires each night when they squatted down on the sand for their supper. This is exactly the tone of mind from which Mohammed tried to deliver them; and truth to tell, it reminded Mrs. Gibson of the ways of some of our Scottish Churches. Was she thinking, I wonder, of what they were in days long past?

I observed that when the camels had to pass between our tents and the brink of the little plateau on which these stood, each of them lifted its feet carefully over the ropes, as if it were endowed with reason.

Wonderful to relate, however, the sciatic pain which had threatened to cripple me ever since I reached Suez, completely disappeared. Joseph, our dragoman, attributed my cure to the camel-riding; and the widow of Professor Bendall tells me that she has had an exactly similar experience after a two days' journey across a desert in India.

After another sleepless and anxious night, we were aroused by a cheery voice, saying, 'I think we can go on to-day.' Oh, the joy of seeing the

blue sky and feeling the warmth of an Eastern sun! Eight o'clock found us again on our camels, and as we crossed the great stony ridge at the top of Wady Tarfa, and turned into another valley, we came in sight of a little rill running rapidly where all had been dryness for many months. My camel-driver exclaimed three times, with ever-increasing fervour, 'There is water! El hamdu-lilahi! Praise be to God!' I re-echoed 'El hamdu-lilahi!' for many things besides the water, and chiefly for our safety.

The camel is a splendid climber. No mule could be more sure-footed, and it takes such great strides that you pass over difficulties which at first appear formidable. But we did not feel so safe in going downhill; and on wet ground it is not easy to keep its feet from slipping.

The little withered shrubs scattered amongst the stones looked lively that morning, and sent forth balmy odours with the evaporation from the ground. Within an hour we came in sight of a glorious range of mountains half-veiled in dusky clouds. Its highest summit was named Ruchab, a lofty peak on the right being Jebel Imrât. On riding to the top of a ridge, the towering form of Jebel Mousa burst on our view, crowned with its ruined chapel, a reddish granite hill separating it from the Wady Suwail. This spot is considered by some, including our friends the monks, to be the site of the Giving of the Law; but it hardly answers to the description so well as does its companion peak, the Râs Sufsafeh, with the great plain of Er-Rahah in front of it.

The path which leads from the hill Moneja to the monastery has been cleared of stones and greatly improved, either at the expense of the Egyptian Government or of the monks. We received a warm welcome from the latter, some of whom were old friends, and others new-comers from the thirty-four branch monasteries in Russia, Roumania, Crete, Asia Minor, etc., which are attached to the Sinai one. The garden terrace, where we have pitched our tents on five former occasions, was several feet deep in water; so our encampment was made in the outer court of the convent, close to the entrance door. The night was quite as tempestuous as the two preceding ones, but we slept like stones, knowing that we were fixed on ground firmer than that in the Wady Tarfa, and that, as Father Benjamin, the *wakeel*, or Bursar, assured us, we had only to pull a long

bell-rope, and at any time of night the monastery door would fly open to admit us.

On Sunday morning, however, we judged it prudent to accept of the monks' proffered hospitality, and, by the Archbishop's directions, we were installed in His Grace's own newly furnished rooms. On the northern side they commanded a truly magnificent view down the valley, and over the historic plain Er-Rahah. On the southern side they opened on to a long balcony, like those in Swiss hotels. In the other rooms to which this gave access, Dr. C. R. Gregory of Leipzig was our nearest neighbour; then Father Chrysanthos, the Hegoumenos; then a special kitchen for the visitors; and then forty-seven Russian pilgrims of the peasant class, escorted by a gaily dressed Montenegrin *cawass*, only ten of them being men. The pilgrimage from Russia has, as might be expected, fallen off this year; two hundred being the usual number, arriving in two relays, and staying for three days.

On Tuesday night we again slept in our tents, but though the rain had ceased, a terrific wind drove us back to the convent. On Friday we descended for good; but were greeted with showers of hard, fine snow, which whitened the ground, but did not lie long. It covered the mountain-tops to a depth of several feet, and made the summit of Jebel Caterina quite inaccessible, even to the enterprising Dr. Gregory, and to his Belgian namesake, Dr. Grégoire of Liège, and his friend, M. Barr. These gentlemen had already been three weeks in the monastery. The library was opened for their benefit and Mrs. Gibson's for three and a half hours on most mornings, and an hour every afternoon. Each student had also the privilege of having one manuscript at a time in his bedroom. We, of course, could not avail ourselves of this, as no one is now permitted to carry a manuscript out of the convent, or to keep one in his tent. Father Galakteon's excessive kindness to us in 1892 and 1893 is not likely to be repeated. I regret to say that, owing to the rough treatment to which a manuscript was subjected by a Greek student, photographing was also forbidden. I hope this regulation may be only temporary. The librarian has now a book, in which he enters the date of a manuscript being given out, and the date of its return.

The monks are, in fact, imbued with a strong desire to guard their treasures from theft or

ill-usage. But I certainly had no cause to complain. I was installed in the new sunny room which was built in 1894, and there for six hours a day I had the Syriac Palimpsest of the Gospels all to myself. A young monk, Anthemios, was at first set to watch me; but when he and Father Benjamin had satisfied themselves that I was quite as anxious to handle it carefully as they could be, he was sent away to attend to the other students in the library. I was greatly pleased to see how completely a new leaf has been turned in this respect.

I have said, in the May number of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, that the after effect of the reagent which I used, namely, hydro-sulphide of ammonia, is a cleansing one. It can be used with safety only, I think, on vellum which is very dry. This seems to suck it in, and be none the worse. But I do not recommend it for leaves which have become soft and flabby through long immersion in water. And I have found it a good plan to dry the page immediately with clean blotting-paper. This prevents any little pools of water from standing on it and causing wrinkles, while at the same time the blotting-paper takes off all loose dirt. I am certain that this has made several passages in the Syriac Gospels more legible than they were in 1893.

The only other European visitors who came during our three weeks' stay at the monastery were a party of fourteen Dominican monks on their way to Jerusalem. They stayed for the usual three days, and made the ascent of the Jebel Mousa, spending a night at the ruined convent of the Arba'in, where four rooms have been fitted up for strangers, and where our old friend, Father Euthymios, now lives as a hermit. On the morning when they were toiling up the steep path called the "Way of our Lord Moses," my sister and I were taking our usual walk along the road which leads up the valley towards Jebel Moneja. We distinctly heard their voices as they spoke to each other, though they were more than half a mile away, and I am convinced that we might have carried on a conversation with them, if we had thought of it.

On March 5th we descended to Tor by the

Wady Islih. Snow again fell at the convent after we had left. We did not see it, though we wondered why the wind was so bitterly cold. Every day of our stay in the desert we had witnessed that continuous struggle between the sun and the clouds, which doubtless suggested to the Greeks of old the idea of a quarrel amongst their gods. On our way down the valley, we had to get over some difficulties in the way of rocks. One morning, when we had sent the camels by a longer and easier way, we tried a short-cut along the bed of the stream. The result was that we had to take a jump of about twelve feet in order to extricate ourselves from an awkward position. Joseph broke it for us by making us step on to his hand in our descent.

The air of the Sinai mountains is most invigorating. I have heard people compare it to champagne; and for those who can endure to be broiled at noonday, and frozen at night, nothing could be better in ordinary years. This time the winter rains came unusually late; yet we, who had left nearly all our warm clothing behind at Suez, returned home stronger than when we had left it. This strengthens my conviction that the children of Israel had a physical, as well as a moral and spiritual, preparation for entering the Promised Land; and as now the Khedivial Company's steamboats touch at Tor three times in a fortnight, I trust that means may shortly be devised for making the desert monastery less inaccessible, so that some of my readers may be induced to try it for themselves.

POSTSCRIPT.—Since the above narrative was written, I have received glad news from Archbishop Porphyrius. He tells me that the missing leaf of the Sinai Palimpsest (f. 101) *has at length been found, and has been restored to its place in the manuscript.*

I stated in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES (vol. xiii. p. 406) that, in the event of this happy restitution, 'no questions would be asked, nor would any attempt be made on our part to acquire information which was not voluntarily given.' I intend to keep my promise.