

HIDING PLACES IN CANAAN.

I.—JEREMIAH'S GIRDLE AND FARAH.

IN order that the prophet might wear a new girdle (Jer. xiii, 1—11), does it not really seem a needless expenditure of time and strength for him to go twice to Euphrates when the nearest point of the river is about 400 miles distant from Jerusalem?

But how otherwise is the difficulty to be explained? "It was done only in a vision" say some; but this is most unsatisfactory, as nothing of the kind is stated in the narrative. The Speaker's Commentary, not liking the vision nor yet the long journey, states that internal evidence allows of its transporting Jeremiah for 7 years for safety to the neighbourhood of the Euphrates, so that the prophet has the long journey only at the beginning and end of his stay. An *unmentioned* visit to—with a sojourn at—the Euphrates seems however to me, as great a difficulty as the one it is meant to solve.

Grotius thinks that the girdle hidden at Euphrates represented Judah in exile at Babylon: if the Bible said so, the question, of course, would be at once settled, but as it does not, it is simply a conjecture to be taken on its own merits.

What then are we to do? Look closely at the narrative. "Take the girdle . . . and arise, go to Euphrates, and hide it there in a hole of the rock." The Hebrew word for *rock* (*Sela*) always means a *cliff*, and the Speaker's Commentary adds that there are no cliffs by the Euphrates near Babylon. Accordingly if it were admitted that Jeremiah might have gone to that city, he would still have to ascend the river as far as Pylæ (a hundred miles distant) in order to find a *cliff*.

Then it has been proposed to read Ephrath or Ephrata (*i.e.*, Bethlehem) instead of Euphrates, but this requires the Hebrew letter *aleph* to have been omitted four times in this passage, a *serious* alteration in the original text, so that Gesenius rejects the suggestion.

Besides a "Sela" or cliff is not (so far as I know) to be found *quite close* to Bethlehem.

The true explanation seems to me to be simplicity itself. First, the Hebrew letters making the word "Phrath" (translated Euphrates) cannot in this case consistently with Biblical usage, mean the well known river. In addition to this passage, the word occurs just 15 times in the Bible and refers in every case to the River Euphrates, but then (be it observed) the word "river" is added in 13 instances, and in the two remaining cases the expressions are "Carchemish by Euphrates" (2 Chron. xxxv, 20), and "When thou comest to Babylon . . . cast it into the midst of Euphrates" (Jer. li, 61—63). Thus the two places specified define what is meant by "Phrath," but in this passage we have *simply* the expression "to Euphrates" (thrice) and "by Euphrates" (once), and ~~no mention~~ of "the river" or of *any place*.

About 3 miles N.E. of Anathoth is a most picturesque spot,—a gorge between savage rocks, frequented by wild pigeons. Here a copious stream, abounding with fish, gushes forth :—altogether it is the very place for a picnic. It is called Fârah, and represents the ancient Parah of Benjamin (Josh. xviii, 23). This is undoubtedly the place to which Jeremiah was sent.

Here in the rocks we have *the cliff* required, and the identical Hebrew letters thrice translated “to Euphrates” mean also (when the points are omitted) “to Parah.” The only alteration in the text needed in order to avoid the difficulties of this passage, is that to read “at Parah” instead of “by Euphrates” we must *just once* change the letter *Tau* into *He*, a very slight correction indeed.

It seems to me therefore that as Euphrates was a world-wide known name and Parah only an obscure place, accidentally or intentionally the He was by some one altered into a Tau, so that the passage became more intelligible to the ancient scribe, but most difficult to the modern critic.

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THE ROCK RIMMON AND GIBEAH.

IN favour of the site *east* of Jeb'a, and in reply to Lieutenant Conder's further objection on p. 173, it may be added :

I. That the direction of the Flight was apparently *eastward*, “They chased them and trode them down with ease (unto) over against Gibeah toward the sun-rising.” Judges xx, 43.

II. A wrong identification must not be used as an argument, and it seems to me a groundless mistake to put the battle-field at Jeb'a (Geba) “only a mile and a-half” or two miles from the cave, since “the men of Israel rose up out of their place and put themselves in array at Baaltamar” (Judges xx, 33); “which Jewish tradition identifies with the large ruin 'Attâra” (“Handbook,” 404), three miles north-west of Jeb'a, and nearly five miles from the cave.

The question about Geba and Gibeah, names often confused or interchanged in the Hebrew, requires notice :

(A) Geba, the priestly city (Joshua xxi, 17 ; Isaiah x, 29), apparently called Gaba in Joshua xviii, 24, and “Gibeah in the field” in Judges xx, 31, and “Geba of Benjamin,” 1 Kings xv, 22, may be recognised with certainty in the present Jeb'a.

(B) Gibeah (Judges xix, 13, etc.) must have been close to the great north road, for the Levite on his way from Bethlehem to the house of God (?at Shiloh or Bethel), proposed to lodge “in Gibeah or in Ramah” (Er Ram), and “the sun went down upon them when they were by (=close by) Gibeah . . . and they turned aside thither” (Judges xix,