

# Jesus In Bethanath, Galgal, Elcese, And Saphet

The Apostles and several of the disciples went on ahead, while Jesus with some of the others returned by the way He had come; that is, He went back to Bethanath, one hour and a half to the south of Saphet.

When within about half an hour of Bethanath, He was met by a blind man, who was led by two lovely boys in short, yellow tunics and large chip hats that shaded them from the sun. They were the children of Levites. The man was old and of honorable standing; he had long hoped for Jesus' coming. Accompanied by the boys, who had seen Jesus approaching, he hurried forward to meet Him, crying out from a distance: "Jesus, Thou Son of David, help me! Have mercy on me!" When he came up with Him, he cast himself at His feet and said: "Lord, Thou wilt certainly give me light again! I have awaited Thee for so long, and for so long I have felt interiorly that Thou wouldst come and cure me!" Jesus replied: "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee according to thy faith," and taking him to a fountain in the grove, He commanded him to wash his eyes. The man's eyes, as well as his whole forehead, were ulcerated and covered with a crust. When he had washed, the scales fell from his eyes. Then Jesus anointed them with oil, as also his forehead and temples. Sight immediately returned, and the man gave thanks. Jesus blessed him and the two boys, and predicted that they should at some future day announce the word of God.

They now drew near the city, outside which the Apostles and other disciples again joined Jesus. Many of the citizens had here gathered, and when they saw the blind man coming back with his sight restored, their joy was quite extraordinary. The man's name was Ktesiphon. But he was not that blind Ktesiphon who likewise was cured, and who afterward became a disciple and went with Lazarus to Gaul. Jesus, accompanied by the Levites and all the people, went to the synagogue in which He delivered an instruction. The Feast of the Dedication, or the Feast of Lights as it was sometimes called, was still being celebrated, so that it was a kind of holiday. Jesus again explained the parables of the sower and of the Good Shepherd. The people were good and quite joyous over Jesus' coming among them. He stopped in the Levites' house near the school. There were no Pharisees in Bethanath. The Levites lived together as in a monastery and sent people out to other places.

Bethanath was once a fortified city and full of pagans, for the tribe of Nephtali, instead of exterminating them, had long held them tributary. But at this time there were no pagans in the city. They had been expelled when the Temple was re-established, when Esdras and Nehemias had obliged the Jews to send away their heathen wives. The terrible threats that God made to His people by the Prophets if they persevered in such alliances and refused to drive the pagans from the country, thereby exposing themselves to ever-present temptation to contract marriages with heathens, were fully realized; for around Tabor and in the chain between Endor and Scythopolis, where the peaks are so irregularly piled one on another, and where I saw so much gold hidden in the earth, the heathens had never been driven out, and the country had therefore become a wilderness.

From Bethanath Jesus went with the Apostles and disciples northward around Saphet to Galgal, a large, beautiful place through which ran a great highway. He went with His followers to the synagogue. There were some Pharisees in this city. Jesus preached vehemently against them, explained all the passages of the Prophet Malachias that spoke of the Messiah, the Precursor John, and of the new, clean Sacrifice. He ended by announcing that the time for the fulfillment of these Prophecies had arrived.

From Galgal Jesus went eastward to Elcese, which lay to the north of Saphet, and where the Prophet Nahum was born. Here He taught for a short time and visited the leper hospital, where He cured about eight of the inmates and commanded them to show themselves to the priests in Saphet. He also taught the shepherds. I saw in the fields around Elcese grass of extraordinary height, and in it numbers of camels grazing. Jesus went likewise to a mountain containing many caves, in which dwelt heathens, whom He instructed. The whole day was spent in walking, instructing and curing, for everywhere on the roads the sick and suffering were brought to Jesus.

Toward evening He arrived at Bethan, which lay to the west under the heights of Saphet and about one hour from Bethanath. It was a little place, a colony from Bethanath, and was situated so near to the steep, western heights of Saphet that from them they could look down upon the little town. Jesus and the disciples put up here with some relatives, for the daughter of Elizabeth's sister was married at Bethan. She had five children, of whom the youngest girl was about twelve years old. The sons were already from eighteen to

twenty. This family, with some others disposed like themselves, lived apart in a row of houses built near the walls of the city. Some were built in the rocks, some in the walls themselves. All belonged to the married Essenians, and the husband of Elizabeth's niece was the Superior. The family owned here some property inherited from their forefathers. They were very pious people. They spoke to Jesus of John and asked Him with anxiety whether or not he would soon be set at liberty. Jesus replied in words that made them very grave and sad, though without disturbing their peace of mind.

John had visited them when he came first from the source of the Jordan in the wilderness, and they had been among the first to go to his baptism. They spoke to Jesus of their sons, whom they intended soon to send to the fishery at Capharnaum. Jesus replied that those fishermen, that is Peter and his companions, had begun another kind of fishing, and that their young sons also would follow Him in their own good time. They did indeed join The Seventy-Two. Jesus taught and cured here. I heard Him saying that the other disciples were then on the confines of Sidon and Tyre, and that He Himself would go back to Judea. I saw that Thomas showed great pleasure at the prospect of this journey, because he anticipated opposition on the part of the Pharisees and hoped to be able to dispute with them. He expressed his sentiments to the other disciples, but they did not appear to share his satisfaction. Jesus reproved his exaggerated zeal, and told him that a time would come when his own faith would waver. But Thomas could in nowise understand His words.

While Jesus was teaching on the Beatitudes in the school at Beten, the Pharisees of Saphet came down to invite Him to their city for the Sabbath. He explained before them the parable of the seed falling on different kinds of ground, but they would not understand the allusion contained in the rocky soil. They disputed the point with Him, but He soon reduced them to silence. When they invited Him for the Sabbath, He replied that He would go with them for the sake of the lost sheep, but that both they and the Sadducees (some of whom were at Saphet) would be scandalized on His account. They replied: "Rabbi, leave that to us." Jesus responded that He knew them well, and that their unrighteousness filled the land. He went up to Saphet, followed by many from Bethan. Saphet on this side was built on so steep a part of the mountain that frequently the roof of one house was on a level

with the ground floor of another. The road lay far below the houses, to which one had to mount by steps hewn in the rock. It took half an hour to climb up to the synagogue, where the mountain assumed the form of a great plateau whose northeastern declivity was not so steep. Outside the city Jesus was received with solemn ceremony by many good people. They surrounded Him waving green branches and singing canticles. Then they washed His feet, as well as those of the disciples, and offered them the customary refreshments. Thus attended, Jesus reached the synagogue, where a great crowd was assembled. The Feast of the Dedication closed today, and they were celebrating that of the new moon as well as the Sabbath; besides all this, the desire to see Jesus and His disciples added to the numbers present.

Saphet could boast of many Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and simple Levites. There was a kind of religious school here, in which youths were educated in all the Jewish liberal arts and in theology. Thomas, a couple of years before, had been a student at this school. He went now to visit one of the head teachers, a Pharisee, who expressed his wonder at seeing him in such company. But Thomas silenced him by his zealous defense of Jesus' actions and teachings. Some Pharisees and Sadducees from Jerusalem had managed to insinuate themselves into this school, and their arbitrary dealings rendered them insupportable to even the Pharisees and teachers of the place. Among them were some of those who had sent for Jesus. They addressed Him in a very insinuating speech in which, alluding to His fame and His miracles, they suggested that He should raise no excitement or commotion in their city. They had been very much scandalized at the solemn reception tendered Him by the people. As the Sabbath had not yet begun, Jesus replied to them in the outer porch before all the people. He spoke in very strong language of the disturbance and scandal which, owing to their efforts, had been spread throughout the country. He, however, mentioned nothing in particular, though He challenged them to upbraid Him with anything wherein He had violated the Law, He who had been sent by His Father for its perfect accomplishment.

While thus disputing with them, the lepers whom He had healed the day before at Elcese presented themselves to fulfill His order to go to the priests for inspection. Jesus exclaimed: "Behold how I fulfill the Law! I ordered these men to appear before you, although they had no obligation to do so, since

they were made clean instantaneously by the command of God, and not by the skill of man." This encounter greatly vexed the Pharisees, who went nevertheless to examine into the cure. It was usual in such cases merely to inspect the breast. If that was clean, the whole person was judged to be the same. The Pharisees, astounded and vexed, were forced to declare these men freed from the ban of leprosy.

Besides the passages of Scripture appointed for this particular Sabbath, Jesus taught from Genesis, from the First Book of Kings, and likewise upon the Ten Commandments. He dwelt upon several points deduced from His texts, which both Pharisees and Sadducees felt in their hearts were thrusts at themselves. He spoke of the fulfillment of the Promises and announced the chastisement of God upon all that would not profit by His exhortations to penance. He alluded to the destruction of the Temple and the ruin of many cities. He spoke of the true Law, which they did not comprehend, and of their own law of yesterday, as He denominated it, which He absolutely condemned. I understood that He meant by this latter something like the Jewish books of the present day, the Talmud, I think, because here at Saphet they were especially esteemed and studied.

The exercises of the synagogue over, Jesus and the disciples went to the house of one of the Pharisees to the place, who kept a public inn for teachers and rabbis. The other Pharisees also took part in the repast. During the meal, Jesus read the Pharisees a severe lecture, because they reproached the disciples for not washing their hands before coming to table and for neglecting other observances customary before eating. He likewise checked them for their ridiculous fastidiousness respecting the serving up of the food, for they were accustomed to reprehend the servers for the slightest stain upon the dishes or their contents.

Next morning numbers of very sick persons, some of them aged, were brought and ranged in the courtyard before the house in which Jesus was stopping. It had cost their friends no little trouble to bring them from the pathless, mountainous city. Jesus began to cure them one after another. Some were deaf; others blind, palsied, lame; in a word, there were sick of all kinds among them. Jesus made use of prayer, the imposition of hands,

consecrated oil, and in general of more ceremonies than usual. He spoke with the disciples, taught them to make use of this manner of curing, and exhorted the sick according to their various needs.

The Pharisees and Sadducees from Jerusalem were very much scandalized at all that they saw. They wanted to send away some of the newly arrived sick, and they began to quarrel. They would by no means tolerate such disturbance on the Sabbath, and so great a tumult arose that Jesus, turning to them, inquired what they wanted. And now they began a dispute with Him on the subject of His teaching, especially of His constant reference to the Father and the Son. "But," they said, "we know well whose Son Thou art!" Jesus replied that whoever does the will of the Father is the son of the Father.

But that he who does not keep the Commandments has no right to raise his voice in judgment upon others; he should rather rejoice at not being cast out of the house as an intruder. But they continued to allege all sorts of objections against His cures, to accuse Him of not having washed before the meal of the preceding evening, and to repudiate His charge against them of not keeping the Law. They went so far that Jesus, to their exceedingly great terror, began to write on the wall of the house, and in letters that they alone could decipher, their secret sins and transgressions. Then He asked them whether they wanted the writing to remain upon the wall and become publicly known, or whether, effacing it, they would permit Him to continue His work in peace. The Pharisees were thoroughly frightened. They rubbed out the writing and slunk away, leaving Jesus to continue His cures. These Pharisees had been guilty of embezzlement of the public funds. Legacies and donations intended for the foundation of homes for widows and orphans, they had used for the erection of all kinds of magnificent buildings. Saphet was rich in such establishments, and yet there were to be found in it numbers of poor, miserable creatures.

That evening Jesus closed the instructions in the synagogue, and passed the night in the same house. There was a fountain near the synagogue. The mountain of Saphet was beautiful and green, covered with numerous trees and gardens. The roads were bordered by sweet-scented myrtles. High up on the plateau were large, four-cornered houses and solid foundations around which could be erected tent habitations. This city was largely engaged in the manufacture of vestments for the priests, and it was full of students and learned men.

