

Jesus in Sephoris, Bethulia, Ceddes, and Jezrael

From the last place, Jesus crossed a mountain with the three disciples and went to Sephoris, four hours' distance from Nazareth. He stopped at His great aunt's. She was Anne's youngest sister Maraha, and the mother of a daughter and two sons. These sons were habited in long, white garments. They were named respectively Arastaria and Cocharia, and later on they joined the disciples.

The Blessed Virgin, Mary Cleophas, and other women had also come hither. The feet of Jesus were washed, and a repast prepared in His honor. He passed the night in Maraha's house, which had been the home of Anne's

parents. Sephoris was a large city, and in it were three different sects: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenians, each with its own school. This city often suffered severely from war. At the present day, it is scarcely in existence.

Jesus stayed some days here, preaching and exhorting His hearers to go to the baptism of John. He taught in two synagogues on the same day, in a large, high one, and in a small one. The large one belonged to the Pharisees. They listened indignantly to His words, and murmured against Him. The women were present at this instruction; but in the other synagogue, the small one that belonged to the Essenians, there was no place for women. Jesus was kindly received by the Essenians.

As Jesus was teaching in the school of the Sadducees, something very wonderful took place. There were in Sephoris numbers of demoniacs, simpletons, lunatics and possessed. They were instructed in a school near the synagogue, which latter place they were obliged to attend when prayer and teaching were going on. They had a hall in the rear reserved for themselves, and they were made to listen attentively. Custodians armed with whips stood among them, each with few or more under his charge, according as they were more or less troublesome. Before Jesus entered, I saw these poor creatures during the teaching of the Sadducees distorting their countenance and falling into convulsions. Their keepers had to bring them to order with the lash. When Jesus made His appearance, they were at first quite still; but



after a little while one began and then another to cry out: "That is Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, and visited by Wise Men from the East. His Mother is now with Maraha. He is preaching new doctrine, which we must not tolerate." And so they went on recounting aloud the whole life of Jesus and all that had happened to Him up to the present time. Now this one began, then that one took it up. The lashes of the custodians availed naught, for soon all began to cry out together and the confusion became general. Then Jesus commanded them to be brought to Him outside the synagogue, and He sent two disciples to collect all the other insane from the different quarters of the city and bring them also. Soon there was a crowd, fully fifty such unfortunates around Him, and multitudes of others, all eager to see what would happen. The insane kept up their cries. Then Jesus spoke, saying: "The spirit that speaks through these, is from below. Let it again go below!" And at the same instant, all became quiet. They were cured, and I saw several fall to the ground.

And now a great tumult, excited by the cure, broke out in the city, and Jesus and His followers were in great danger. The excitement became so great that Jesus escaped into a house and left the city that night. The Blessed Virgin, the three disciples, with Cocharia and Arastaria, the sons of Anne's sister, left the city also. The Mother of Jesus was in great trouble and anxiety, for this was the first time she had seen her Son so violently persecuted. Jesus had appointed some trees outside the city as a meeting place, and from there all went on together to Bethulia.

The majority of those cured by Jesus in Sephoris, went to John's baptism. Later on they were the principal ones of the city who followed Jesus. Bethulia is that city at whose siege Judith slew Holofernes. It was built on a mountain southeast of Sephoris. The view from it extended far around into the distance. Magdalen's castle in Magdalum was not far off, and Magdalen herself was at this time at the height of her glory. Bethulia, too, possessed a castle and the place was rich in springs. Jesus and His disciples entered an inn outside Bethulia, and thither came Mary and the holy women again to meet Him. I heard Mary talking to Him, begging Him not to teach here again, for she was afraid there might be another insurrection. But Jesus replied that He knew what He had to accomplish. Mary asked: "Shall we not now go to John's baptism?" To which Jesus answered gravely: "Why shall we now go to John's baptism? Have we need of it? I shall journey and reap still a while longer, and I shall say when it

is time to go to the baptism." As afterward at Cana, Mary kept silence. I have seen that the holy women received baptism not till after Pentecost, and then in the Pool of Bethesda. The holy women went on into the city. Jesus taught on the Sabbath in the synagogue, and many from the country around came to hear Him. Here in Bethulia, also, I saw numbers of insane and possessed on the highroad outside the city and, here and there, on the streets through which Jesus passed. They were quieted and freed from their paroxysms. The people said among themselves: "This man must possess a power like unto that of the ancient prophets, since those unfortunates grow calm on His appearance." They felt benefitted by His presence, even though apparently He did nothing special for them; and so they sought Him in the inn to thank Him. He taught and exhorted to John's baptism, and spoke with as much vehemence as did John himself.

The people of Bethulia gave to Jesus and His followers a most honorable reception. They would not allow Him to put up at the inn outside the city, but strove among themselves as to who should have the honor of entertaining Him in their houses. They that had not Jesus, at least wanted one of the five disciples who were with Him. But they, the disciples, would not leave their Master. At last, Jesus promised to make the inn and the houses of the good people His headquarters alternately. Their great enthusiasm and love for Him were not altogether disinterested, and Jesus charged them with it during His instruction in the synagogue. They had a secondary design. They wanted, by entertaining the new Prophet, to attract to their city that esteem which they had lost by their trade and intercourse with heathens. They were also destitute of a pure love of truth.

When Jesus left Bethulia, I saw Him in a valley teaching under the trees. Besides the five disciples, there were now about twenty others following Him. The holy women had already returned to Nazareth. Jesus had left Bethulia because He was so much besieged by the people. Numbers of sick and possessed from the country around had gathered in the city, hoping to be cured; but Jesus did not as yet wish to heal so openly. As He journeyed away from Bethulia, He left the Sea of Galilee behind. The place in which He next taught was an old place of instruction formerly used by the Essenians, or Prophets. It consisted of an elevated, grassy mound, surrounded by little parapets against which the audience could rest comfortably. There were about thirty people around Jesus in this place.

That evening I saw Him with His followers arrive at the little village with its

synagogue, about one hour's distance from Nazareth, whence not long before He had set out to go to Sephoris. The inhabitants received Him with every mark of kindness. They conducted Him to a large house in front of which was a courtyard, washed His feet, as also those of the disciples, cleaned and brushed His travelling garments, and prepared for Him and His followers a repast. Jesus taught here in the synagogue. The holy women were in Nazareth.

Next day He went about two miles further on toward the Levitical city, Cedes, or Cesion. He was followed by about seven possessed, who still more plainly than those of Sephoris, proclaimed His mission and history. Aged priests and youths in long, white garments came forth from the city to meet Him, for some of His followers had already gone before Him into the city. Jesus did not free the possessed here. They were confined in a house by the priests, that they might not create disorder. But He freed them later after His baptism. He was quite well received and entertained in this place, but when He proposed to teach, they questioned Him: What call had He? What mission? Was He merely Joseph and Mary's Son? Jesus answered evasively that He who had sent Him and to whom He belonged, would make all that known at His baptism. He taught many other things on this point and also of the baptism of John. His instructions were given on a hill in the center of the place where, as at Thebez, a stand had been prepared for the purpose, not exactly in the open air, but under a rush-covered tent or shed.

Jesus went from here through the pastoral region where later, after the second Pasch, He healed a leper. He taught in the different little villages around. But for the Sabbath, He went with His companions to Jezrael, a scattered place, the houses, which were built in groups, being separated from one another by ruins, towers, and gardens. A high road ran through the city, called King's street. Jesus had with Him only three of His companions, several having gone on before.

Jezrael was the home of strict observers of the Jewish Law. They were not Essenians, however, but Nazarites. They made vows for a time, longer or shorter, and practiced various kinds of mortification. They had a large institution, comprising different sections. The unmarried men occupied one part exclusively, the unmarried women another. The married also made vows of continency for a certain period, during which the husbands lived in a house next to that of the unmarried men, while the wives retired to that of the single women. They were all habited in gray and white. Their Superior

wore a long, gray garment edged with fringe and little white ornaments like fruit, and bound by a gray girdle on which were inscribed white letters. Around one arm was a band of coarse, gray and white woven stuff as thick as a twisted napkin, one end of which—ornamented with tufted fringe—hung down a little. He wore a collar, or little mantle, almost like that of Argos, the Essenian, excepting that it was gray and open behind instead of in front. A blank shield was fastened on it in front, while behind it was tied or laced. On the shoulders hung slit lappets. All wore black, shining, puffed caps, with some words stamped on the front; three bands met on top forming a ball, which, like the rim, was white and gray. The Nazarites had long, thick curly hair and beards. I tried to think which of the Apostles looked like them and, at last, I remembered that it was Paul. His hair and garments, when he persecuted the Christians, were in the style of the Nazarites.

I saw him afterward, also, with the Nazarites, for he was one of them. They used to let their hair grow until their vow was accomplished, when they cut it off and burned it in sacrifice. They sacrificed pigeons, also. One could assume and fulfill the unfulfilled vows of another. Jesus celebrated the Sabbath with them. Jezrael is separated from Nazareth by a mountain range. Not far from it is a well near which Saul once encamped with his army.

Jesus taught on the Sabbath of the baptism of John. He said that, although their piety was praise-worthy, yet excess was dangerous; that there are different ways to salvation; that splits in the community would easily give rise to sects; that, in their pride, they looked down upon their weaker brethren who could not do so much as they themselves, but who should be succored by the stronger. Such teaching as His was very necessary here, for in the suburbs there were people who had mixed with the heathens, and who were destitute of rule or direction, because the Nazarites had separated from them. Jesus visited these people in their homes, and invited them to His instruction on baptism.

Next day Jesus was present at a repast given Him by the Nazarites, at which circumcision was spoken of in connection with baptism. For the first time, I heard Jesus speaking of circumcision, but I cannot exactly recall His words. He said something to this effect, that the law of circumcision had a reason for its existence which would soon be taken away, when the people of God would come forth no longer according to the flesh from the family of Abraham, but spiritually from the Baptism of the Holy Ghost.

Great numbers of the Nazarites became Christians; but they clung so tenaciously to Judaism that many of them, seeking to combine Christianity with it, fell into heresy.