

Jesus Goes to Giskala, The Birthplace of St. Paul

From Dabereth Jesus went in the forenoon with the disciples three hours northward to the plain and city of Giskala, almost an hour from Bethulia. Just at the outset of His journey lay a place to the east, I think Japhia, and another directly opposite toward the west and northward from Tabor. Giskala was situated upon a height, but one not so elevated as that of Bethulia.



It was a stronghold garrisoned by pagan soldiers in Herod's pay. The Jews dwelt in a little quarter apart, about fifteen minutes distant from the fortress. Giskala was very different from other cities. There were open squares and large buildings surrounded with palisades, as if to afford space for hitching horses, and all around the city ran a wall with towers, from whose stories troops of soldiers could defend it. All this gave Giskala a very remarkable appearance. Near one of the towers stood the idolatrous temple. The Jews of the little city lived on good terms with the pagan soldiers, for whom they manufactured articles of leather, harness for the horses and military equipment for the men. They were likewise partly the owners and partly the overseers and stewards of the fertile region lying around the city. Far from it, off to Capharnaum, stretched the magnificent country of Genesareth. The citadel stood upon a height up to which led a paved road from terrace to terrace. The little Jewish quarter lay outstretched on the declivity of that same height. Before it was a well, or rather a cistern, for drinking water, which was conducted from distant sources by means of pipes. It was by this cistern that Jesus and the disciples sat down on their arrival.

The residents of the Jewish quarter were just then celebrating a feast and all the inhabitants, young and old, were out in the gardens and fields. The pagan children from the city were present also, but they kept to themselves somewhat apart from the others. When the people spied Jesus going to the cistern, the chief men of the city, with their learned schoolmaster, approached Him. They welcomed Him and the disciples, washed their feet, and presented them fruit. Jesus, still at the cistern, gave an instruction in which He alluded to the harvest in a parable, for in this region at that moment they were busy gathering in their second harvest of grapes and all kinds of fruit. He next went over to where the pagan children were, spoke to

the mothers, blessed them, and cured several who were sick.

The Jews of Giskala were on that day celebrating a feast commemorative of their deliverance from the yoke of a tyrant, the first founder of the Sadducees. He lived over two hundred years before Christ, but I have forgotten his name. He was one of the officers of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, and was charged to watch over the points of faith not found set down in the written Law. He had tormented the people horribly with his rigorous ideas, one of which was that no reward could be hoped from God, but that He was to be served by them as slaves serve their master. Giskala was his birthplace, but his townsmen held his memory in horror. Today's festival was a memorial rejoicing at his death. One of his disciples was from Samaria.

Sadoch, who denied the dogma of the resurrection of the body, continued to promulgate the founder's doctrine. He was a pupil of Antigonus. Sadoch also had a Samaritan accomplice helping to propagate his errors.

Jesus and His disciples lodged with the Elder of the synagogue, and taught in the forecourt of the same. They brought some sick to Him, whom He healed, among them a dropsical old woman. This Elder of the synagogue was a very good and learned man. The people abhorred the Pharisees and Sadducees, and had taken great care to provide themselves with such a teacher. That he might acquire more knowledge, they had sent him travelling far away, even down to Egypt. Jesus conversed a long time with him. As usual, the Elder turned the conversation upon John, whom he praised very highly. He asked Jesus why, powerful and enlightened as He was said to be and as He was in reality, He did not make some effort to free that man so truly grand and admirable.

During His instruction in the forecourt of the synagogue Jesus uttered prophetic words to the disciples concerning Giskala. They were as follows: Three zealots had arisen in Giskala. The first was that one in whose memory the Jews were then celebrating a feast; the second was a great villain, John of Giskala, who had raised a terrible insurrection in Galilee and at the siege of Jerusalem had committed frightful excesses; the third was living at the very time He was speaking. He would pass from hatred to love, would be zealous for the truth, and would convert many to God. This third was Paul, who was born at Giskala, but whose parents afterward removed to Tarsus.

After his conversion and when journeying to Jerusalem, Paul very zealously preached the Gospel at Giskala. His parents' house was still standing, and rented to strangers. It was situated at the extremity of the suburb of Giskala, and at some distance were squares surrounded with palisades and little buildings, like bleaching huts, that reached almost to the city itself. Paul's parents must have carried on the manufacture of linen, or perhaps they had

a weaver's establishment. A pagan officer named Achias now rented and lived in the dwelling house.