

Jesus Journeys Over Libanus To Sidon and Sarepta

Jesus turned off from the lake, and went further on toward Libanus. This He was led to do chiefly by the numerous reports current throughout the country and the great excitement to which they gave rise. Many looked upon John as the Messiah, but others spoke of another whom John's words seemed to designate. The companions of Jesus on this journey numbered from six to twelve. Some turned off at different points on the road, while others joined Him. His instructions pleased them, and they began to think that He must be the One of whom John spoke. Jesus attached Himself particularly to none. He was properly speaking alone, but He was sowing and preparing. In all that He did I saw many relations to the actions of the Prophets and to their fulfillment, especially to those of Elias.



Jesus went with His companions over a spur of Libanus toward the great city Sidon lying along the sea. From the mountain height, the view was indescribably beautiful. The city was apparently quite close to the sea; but viewed from its own plane, one could see that it was fully forty-five minutes distant from the shore. It was a large, busy place. Gazing down upon it from on high, one might fancy that he was looking upon an innumerable fleet of ships; for from the numerous flat roofs arose a forest of high poles and flagstaffs, with long streamers of red and other colors, while white canvas was stretched from pole to pole, or floated in the breeze. These booths were swarming with people at their different avocations. Between the houses, I saw all kinds of shining vessels being prepared. The country around was dotted with exceedingly fertile spots, all teeming with fruit. In and around these gardens were numbers of immense trees, some surrounded by seats. Steps led up into others, so that quite a company could sit in their branches as in a summer house. The plain in which the city lay between the mountain and the sea was not very broad.

There were both Jews and pagans in the city. They carried on business with one another, and idolatry was general. The Lord on His way taught and preached in the shady places under the great trees, speaking of John, of his baptism, and of penance. Jesus was well received in the city. He had been there once before. In the school He taught of the coming of the Messiah and of the downfall of idolatry. Queen Jezabel who so persecuted Elias was from this city.

Jesus left His companions in Sidon, and went to a little place more to the south and away from the sea. He wanted to be alone to pray. On one side it was entirely flanked by a wood. It had thick walls, and was surrounded by vineyards. It was Sarepta, the place in which Elias was fed by the widow. The Jews, as also the pagans, had a superstition connected with that fact. They always allowed pious widows to live in the city walls. They thought by so doing they secured themselves from every danger, and could practice every species of vice in the city. Old men dwelt in the walls at the time of which I am now speaking.

Jesus lodged with an old man in the city wall, in the house once occupied by that widow who fed Elias. The old men who then dwelt in the walls were something like hermits. They lived there in accordance with an ancient custom honoring Elias, meditating and explaining the Prophecies, and chiefly engaged in prayer for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus taught them concerning the Messiah and the baptism of John. They were pious, but entertained many erroneous ideas, of which one was that the Messiah was to come in worldly splendor. Jesus often retired to the wood near Sarepta and there prayed alone. He taught in the synagogue, and occupied Himself also in instructing the children. In the villages around, in which there were numbers of heathens, He exhorted the people not to mix with them. There were some good people here, and some very bad ones. Jesus had no companions, excepting occasionally some resident of the place. I saw Him teaching men and women in the open air, often on hillocks and under trees.

The climate here is such that it always seems to me we are in May, because in Palestine the grain for the second harvest is as far advanced as it is with us in that month. They do not cut the grain so close to the ground as we do. They grasp the stalk below the ear, and cut it off about an ell long. They do

not thrash it. They stand the little sheaves upright and pass over them a roller fastened between two oxen. The grain is much drier than ours, and falls out readily. They separate it in the open air, or in a kind of circular barn with a thatched roof, but open on all sides.

From Sarepta Jesus went to a place lying to the northeast, not far from the plain upon which Ezechiel, caught up in spirit, had the vision of the dry bones coming together. Sinews and flesh took possession of them, the winds passed over them, spirit and life entered into them. I was told that the coming together of the bones and their clothing with flesh were fulfilled by the teaching and baptism of John. But the spirit and life breathed into them was accomplished by Jesus through Redemption and by the descent of the Holy Ghost. Jesus consoled the people, who were very poor and oppressed, and explained to them the vision of Ezechiel.

When He left this place, He went northward to the country which John had first visited on leaving the desert. It was a little sheep rearing place. Noemi and her daughter Ruth dwelt there a long time. Noemi had so good a name among the people that she is still spoken of in those parts. Later she removed to Bethlehem. The Lord taught very zealously here. The time approached for Him to retrace His steps southward and thence to Samaria for His baptism. Jacob also owned fields up here. Through this place ran a little river, back of which far up in the desert lay John's spring. From this spring the road became very steep, reminding me of that which Adam and Eve took when driven from Paradise. It led down to the battlefield of Ezechiel. On Adam and Eve's route, the trees became smaller and smaller and quite misshapen until at last they reached a desolate region where grew some miserable bushes. Paradise was as high above the earth as is the sun. After the Fall it disappeared behind a mountain which seemed to rise before it.

The Saviour, on His return from the shepherds' country to Sarepta, followed the route trodden by the Prophet Elias when going from the brook Carith to Sarepta. Jesus taught here and there as He journeyed on, passing by Sidon. From Sarepta He was soon to go southward for His baptism. He kept the Sabbath in Sarepta. After the Sabbath Jesus started for Nazareth, teaching at

various points on the road. He was some-times attended by companions, and sometimes alone. He went barefoot, putting His sandals on only when about to enter any town or village. He passed through the valleys toward Mount Carmel, and once He was near the road leading down into Egypt, but He turned off to the east.

The Mother of God, Mary Cleophas, the mother of Parmenas, and two other women, I saw going to Nazareth, while Seraphia (afterward), Johanna Chusa, and the son of Veronica, who later on joined the disciples, were on their way to the same place from Jerusalem. They were going to visit Mary, with whom they had become acquainted on their yearly journeys to the Holy City. Mary and Joseph, as also other pious families, were in the habit of visiting through devotion three places during the year; viz., the Temple of Jerusalem, the pine tree near Bethlehem, and Mount Carmel. Anne's family and other pious people usually went to the last named place in May when returning from Jerusalem. There were on the mountain a well and a cave of Elias, the latter like a chapel. Devout Jews were constantly visiting these hallowed places. They came, not at fixed times; but whenever it best suited them, and prayed for the coming of the Messiah. Jewish hermits dwelt on the mountain, and later on Christian cenobites had there their cells.

In a little town on the west side of Mount Tabor, Jesus taught in the school, and spoke of John's baptism. There were five followers around Him, among them some future disciples. The Sanhedrin of Jerusalem dispatched couriers with letters to all the principal places of Palestine in which were Jewish schools and rabbis, telling them to be on their guard against a certain Man, of whom the Baptist said that He was the One that was to come and that He would soon present Himself for baptism. They should have an eye upon the Man and give information of His actions; for if He were indeed the Messiah, He needed not the baptism of John. The members of the Sanhedrin also were very much annoyed when they learned that Jesus was He who as a Boy had taught in the Temple. The couriers went likewise to a city on the road near Hebron, four hours from the sea, in that country wherein the spies of Aaron and Moses found the huge bunches of grapes. The city is called Gaza. There was a very long row of tents reaching from the city to the sea, and under them different kinds of woolen and silk stuffs exposed for sale.

Jesus with five followers taught, here and there, down to the country around Jacob's Well, where He celebrated the Sabbath. When He and His companions were returning to Nazareth, the Blessed Virgin went out to meet her Son. But when she saw that He was not alone, she paused at a distance and went back without saluting Him. I wondered at her self denial. Jesus taught in the school at Nazareth, the holy women being present. The next day, when Jesus taught in the synagogue before a large audience, the holy women were not present. He was attended by five disciples and about twenty of the young Nazarenes, companions of His boyhood. His hearers murmured at His teaching. They whispered among themselves that He would now, perhaps, take possession of the place of baptism that John had abandoned and there baptizing give Himself out for one like unto John. But, they continued, He was very different from John. John had dwelt in the desert preparing for his mission, but this Jesus they knew well, and they declared that they would not allow Him to deceive them.