

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

feature; and that sometimes the language of the New Testament about the death of Christ is coloured by sacrificial associations. As examples, I may quote John i. 29, 1 John ii. 2 taken in connection with chapter i. 7, 1 Peter i. 19, ii. 24, iii. 18. On the other hand, salvation by means of the death of the innocent is almost or altogether absent from the spiritual thought and life which find expression in the Book of Psalms.

Why it was needful that, in order to save men from the due consequences of their own sins, Christ should die, the documents we have examined do not teach. They thus prompt a question more pressing and difficult than those which they answer. For an answer to this question we shall turn to the teaching of one who, so far as we can judge, understood the mystery of the agony upon the cross much better than did the disciples who were with Christ in the garden, better even than did the beloved Apostles who saw Him on the cross. In our next paper I shall endeavour to expound the all-important teaching of the Epistle to the Romans.

JOSEPH AGAR BEET.

THE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE HOLY LAND.

II.

THE LOW HILLS OR SHEPHELAH.

OVER the Philistine Plain, as you come up from the coast, you see a sloping moorland break into scalps and ridges of rock, and over these a loose gathering of chalk and limestone hills, round, bare and featureless, but with an occasional bastion flung out in front of them. This is the so-called Shephelah—a famous theatre of the history of Palestine—the debatable ground between Israel and the Philistines,

between the Maccabees and the Syrians, between Saladin and the Crusaders.

The name Shephelah means *low* or *lowland*.¹ The Septuagint mostly render it by *plain*,² and even in very recent works, such as Stanley's *Sinai and Palestine*, it has been applied to the Plain of Philistia. But the towns assigned by the O. T. to the Shephelah are all of them situated in the low hills and not on the plain;³ in the first Book of the Maccabees, too, I notice that the town of Adida is described in one passage as being in the Shephelah and in another as over against the plain;⁴ and in the Talmud the Shephelah is expressly distinguished from the plain,⁵ Lydda, being marked as the point of division. We conclude, therefore, that though the name may sometimes have been used to include the Maritime Plain,⁶ the Shephelah proper was the region of *low hills*, between that plain and the high Central Range. The Shephelah would thus be equivalent to our "downs," low hills as distinguished from high, did it not also include the great amount of flat valley land, which is as characteristic of this broken region as the subdued elevation of its hills. The name has been more fitly compared

¹ A feminine form from the verb in the well-known passage *every mountain shall be made low*. It occurs with a like meaning in Arabic, and may possibly be the same root as we find in *Seville* (Gesenius, *Thesaurus*, *sub voce*).

² τὸ πεδίον or ἡ πεδινή.

³ Josh. xv. 33; 2 Chron. xxviii. 18. Ajalon in its vale, and Gimzo to the west of it; Zorah, Eshtaol and Bethshemesh in the Vale of Sorek: Gederah to the north, and En-gannim, Zanoah, and Jarmuth within three miles to the south of Sorek: Adullam and Shocoh up the Vale of Elah (W. es Sunt): Tappuah in the W. el 'Afran; Mareshah, Lachish, and Eglon to the south-west of Beit-Gibrin. The others given have not been properly identified. *Vv.* 45-47 of Joshua xv., which give Philistine towns in the Plain, are probably a later addition. Eusebius describes the Shephelah as all the low country (πεδινή) lying about Eleutheropolis (Beit-Gibrin) to the north and the west. It is about Beit-Gibrin that Clermont-Ganneau and Conder have re-discovered the name, in its Arabic form, Sifa (*Tent Work*, 277).

⁴ 1 Macc. xii. 38; xiii. 13. ἐν τῇ Σεφηλᾷ and κατὰ πρόσωπον τοῦ πεδίου.

⁵ Quoted by Conder, *Handbook*, p. 302. Tal., Jer., Shebiith, 9. 2.

⁶ As shown by Conder in his quotations, *Handbook*, 302: and perhaps by Eusebius (see note above).

to the Scottish "Lowlands," which also are not entirely plain, but have their ranges of hills.

How far north did the Shephelah run? I have spoken of this zone of the Holy Land, as if it were as continuous as the other four. And it is true that the range of low hills between the Maritime Plain and the high Central Range runs all the way north to Esdraelon. From the sea, low hills are seen buttressing the range behind them all the way along. Now the name Shephelah might be correctly applied to the whole length of these low hills:¹ but it does not appear ever to have extended north of Lydda and the Vale of Ajalon. All the towns mentioned in the O. T. as in the Shephelah are south of this; and if Major Conder's identification be correct of "Adida in the Shephelah"² with Haditheh, four miles E.N.E. of Lydda, then this is the most northerly instance of the name. Roughly speaking, the Shephelah meant the low hills south of Ajalon and not those north of Ajalon. Now, very remarkably, this distinction corresponds with a difference of a physical kind—in the relations of these two parts of the low hills to the Central Range. North of Ajalon the low hills which run out on Sharon are connected with the high mountains behind them. You ascend to the latter from Sharon either by long sloping ridges, such as that which to-day carries the telegraph-wire and the high road from Jaffa to Nablus; or else you climb up terraces, like the succession of ranges closely built upon one another, by which the country rises from Lydda to Bethel. But south of Ajalon the low hills do not so hang upon the Central Range, but are separated from the mountains of Judæa by a series of valleys, both wide and narrow, which run all the way from Ajalon to near Beersheba; and it is

¹ The Jerusalem Talmud (quoted by Conder, *Handbook*, p. 302) even applied the name to lower hills across the Jordan.

² 1. Macc. xii. 38: *καὶ Σίμων ὑποδόμησε τὴν Ἀδιδὰ ἐν τῇ Σεφηλά*—evidently as a cover to the road from Joppa which he had won for the Jews.

only where the low hills are thus flung off the Central Range into an independent group, separating Judæa from Philistia, that the name Shephelah seems to have been applied to them.

This difference in the relation of the low hills to the Central Range, north and south of Ajalon, illustrates two important historical phenomena. *First*, it explains some of the difference between the histories of Samaria and Judah. While the northern low hills opposite Samaria are really only approaches, slopes and terraces of access to Samaria's centre, the southern low hills—those opposite Judah—offer no furtherance at all towards this more isolated province: to have conquered them is not to have got footing upon it. And *secondly*, this division between the Shephelah and Judah explains why the Shephelah has so much more interest and importance in history than the northern low hills, which are not so divided from Samaria. It is independent as they are not; and debatable as they cannot be. They are merged in Samaria. It has a history of its own; for they cannot be held by themselves, and it can be, and was, so held at frequent famous periods of war and invasion.

This division between the Shephelah and Judæa is of such importance in the history of the land that it will be useful for us to follow it in detail.

As we ride across the Maritime Plain from Jaffa towards the Vale of Ajalon by the main road to Jerusalem, we become aware, as the road bends south, of getting behind low hills, which gradually shut out the view of the coast. These are spurs of the Shephelah: we are at the back of it, and in front of us are the high hills of the Central Range, with the wide break in them of the Vale of Ajalon. Near the so-called half-way house, the road to Jerusalem enters a steep and narrow defile, the Wady Ali, which is the real entrance to the Central Range, for at its upper end we come out among peaks over 2,000 feet high. But if instead of entering

this steep defile we turn to the south crossing a broad low watershed, we shall find ourselves in the Wady el Ghurab, a valley running southwest, with hills to the east of us touching 2,000 feet, and hills to the west seldom above 800. The Wady el Ghurab brings us out upon the broad Wady es Surar, the Vale of Sorek, crossing which we find the mouth of the Wady en Nagil¹ and ride still south along its straight narrow bed. Here again the mountains to the east of us are over 2,000 feet, cleft by narrow and tortuous defiles, difficult ascents to the Judæan plateau above, while to the west the hills of the Shephelah seldom reach 1,000 feet and the valleys among them are broad and easy. They might stand—especially if we remember that they have respectively Jerusalem and Philistia behind them—for the narrow and broad ways of our Lord's parable. From the end of Wady en Nagil the passage is immediate to the Vale of Elah, the Wady es Sunt, at the spot where David slew Goliath, and from there the broad Wady es Sur runs south, separating by one or two miles the lofty and compact range of Judæa on the east from the lower, looser hills of the Shephelah on the west. The Wady es Sur terminates opposite Hebron:² and there the dividing hollow turns south-west, and runs between peaks of nearly 3,000 feet high to the east, and almost nothing above 1,500 to the west, into the Wady esh Sheria, which finds the sea south of Gaza and may be regarded as the southern boundary of the Shephelah. I have ridden nearly every mile of this great fosse, that has been planted along the ramparts of Judæa, and have described from my own observations the striking difference of its two sides. All down the east, let me repeat, runs that close and lofty barrier of the Central Range, penetrated only by difficult defiles, its edge turreted here and there by a town, giving proof of a tableland

¹ All g's are soft in the modern Arabic of Palestine.

² Near Terkumieh.

behind; but all down the west the low scattered ranges and clusters of the Shephelah, with their shallow dales and softer brows, much open ground and wide passes to the sea. Riding along the fosse between, I understood why the Shephelah was always debatable land, open equally to Israelite and Philistine, and why the Philistine, who so easily overran the Shephelah, seldom got further than its eastern border, on which many of his encounters with Israel took place.

From this definition of its boundaries—so necessary to the understanding of its independence alike of Plain and of Mountain—let us turn to a survey of the Shephelah itself.

The mountains look on the Shephelah, and the Shephelah looks on the sea,—across the Philistine Plain. It curves round this plain from Gaza to Jaffa like an amphitheatre.¹ But the amphitheatre is cut by three or four great gaps—wide valleys that come right through from the foot of the Judæan hills to the sea. Between these gaps the low hills gather in clumps and in short ranges from 500 to 800 feet high, with one or two summits up to 1,500. The formation is of limestone or chalk, and very soft—therefore irregular and almost featureless, with a few prominent outposts upon the plain. In the wide cross valleys there are perennial, or almost perennial, streams, with broad pebbly beds; the soil is alluvial and red, with great cornfields. But on the slopes and glens of each hilly maze between the cross valleys the soil is a grey white; there are no perennial streams, and few springs, but in their place reservoirs of rainwater. The cornfields straggle for want of level space, but the olive-groves are finer than on either the plain below or the range above. Inhabited villages are frequent; the ruins of abandoned ones more so. But the prevailing scenery of the region is of short, steep

¹ Trelawney Saunders, *Introd.*, p 249.

hillsides and narrow glens, with a very few great trees, and thickly covered by brushwood and oak-scrub—crags and scalps of limestone breaking through, and a rough grey torrent bed at the bottom of each glen. In the more open passes of the south, the straight line of a Roman road dominates the brushwood, or you will see the levelled walls of an early Christian convent, and perhaps the solitary gable of a Crusader's church. In the rocks there are older monuments—large wine and oil presses cut on level platforms above ridges that may formerly have been vineyards; and once or twice on a braeside a huge boulder has well-worn steps up it, and on its top little cup-like hollows, evidently an ancient altar. Caves, of course, abound—near the villages bare, blackened dens for men and cattle, but up the unfrequented glens hidden by hanging bush, behind which you disturb only the wild pigeon. Bees murmur everywhere, larks are singing; and although in the maze of hills you may wander for hours without meeting a man, or seeing a house, you are seldom out of sound of the human voice, shepherds and ploughmen calling to their cattle and to each other across the glens. Higher up you rise on to moorland, with rich green grass if there is a spring, but otherwise heath, thorns, and rough herbs that scent the wind. Bees abound here, too, and dragon-flies, kites and crows; and sometimes an eagle floats over from the cliffs of Judæa. The sun beats strong, but you see the sea, and feel its freshness; the high mountains are behind, every night they breathe upon these lower ridges cool, gentle breezes, and the dews are heavy.

Altogether it is a rough, happy land, with its glens and moors, its mingled brushwood and barleyfields; frequently under cultivation, but for the most part broken and thirsty, with few wells and many hiding-places; just the home for strong border-men like Samson, and just the theatre for that guerilla warfare, varied occasionally by pitched battles,

which Israel and Philistia, the Maccabees and Syrians, and Saladin and Richard waged with each other.

The chief encounters of these foes naturally took place in the wide valleys, which cut right through the Shephelah maze. The strategic importance of these valleys can hardly be over-rated, for they do not belong to the Shephelah alone. Each of them is continued by a defile into the very heart of Judæa, not far from an important city, and each of them has at its other end, on the coast, one of the five cities of the Philistines. To realise these valleys is to understand the wars that have been fought on the western watershed of Palestine from Joshua's time to Saladin's.

1. Take the most northerly of these valleys. The narrow plain, along which the present high road to Jerusalem runs, brings you up from Ramleh, to opposite the high Valley of Ajalon. The Valley of Ajalon, which is really part of the Shephelah,¹ is a broad fertile plain gently sloping up to the foot of the Central Range, the steep wall of which seems to forbid further passage. But three gorges break through, and, with sloping ridges between them run up past the two Bethhorons on to the plateau at Gibeon, a few flat miles north of Jerusalem. This has always been the easiest passage from the coast to the capital of Judæa. Throughout history we see hosts swarming up it, or swept down it in flight. At the high head of it invading Israel first emerged from the Jordan Valley, and looked over the Shephelah towards the Great Sea. Joshua drove the Canaanites down to Makkedah in the Shephelah on that day when such long work had to be done that he bade the sun stand still for its accomplishment;² down Ajalon the early men of Ephraim and Benjamin raided the Philistines;³ and by the same way, soon after his accession,

¹ Thus the town of Ajalon was in the Shephelah (2 Chron. xxviii. 18).

² Josh. x. 10. Makkedah is identified by Warren as el-Mughhar to the south of Ekron, but this is very doubtful.

³ 1 Chron. vii. 21; viii. 13.

King David *smote the Philistines*—who had come up about Jerusalem either by this route or the gorges leading from the Vale of Sorek—from *Gibeon until thou come to Gezer*,¹ that looks right up Ajalon. Ages later this rout found a singular counterpart. In 66 A.D. a Roman army under Cestius Gallus came up from Antipatris—on the modern Aujeh, a few miles north-east of Jaffa—by way of Ajalon. When they entered the gorges of the Central Range, they suffered from the sudden attacks of the Jews; and although they actually set Jerusalem on fire and occupied part of it, they suddenly retreated by the way they had come. The Jews pursued, and as far as Antipatris itself smote the Romans in thousands, as David had smitten the Philistines. It may have been because of this that Titus, when he came up to punish the Jews two years later, avoided Ajalon and the gorges at its head, and took the higher and less covered road by Gophna to Gibeah.

But it was in the time of the Maccabean wars and in the time of the Crusades that this part of the Shephelah was most famously contested.

Ajalon was the natural opening into Judæa for the Syrian armies who came by the coast road from the north; and Modin, the home of the Maccabees and origin of the revolt against Syria, lies near the edge of Ajalon, by the very path the invaders took. The first camps on both sides were pitched about Emmaus, not far off the present high road to Jerusalem. The battles rolled—for the battles in the Shephelah were always rolling battles—between Beth-horon and Gezer, and twice the pursuit of the Syrians extended across the last ridges of the Shephelah to Jamnia and Ashdod.² Judas swept right down to Joppa, which his brother Simon gave the Jews as their first port. But the tide sometimes turned, and the Syrians, mastering the

¹ 2 Sam. v. 25; 1 Chron. xiv. 16.

² 1 Macc. iii., iv., ix.

Shephelah fortresses, surged up Ajalon to the walls of Jerusalem.

Now up and down this great channel thirteen centuries later the fortune of war ebbed and flowed in an almost precisely similar fashion. Like the Syrians—and indeed from the same centre of Antioch—the Crusaders took their way to Jerusalem by Tyre, Acre, and Joppa, and there turned up through the Shephelah and the Vale of Ajalon. The First Crusaders found no opposition; two days sufficed for their march from Ramleh to the Holy City. Through the Third Crusade, however, Saladin firmly held the Central Range, and though parties of Christians swept up within sight of Jerusalem, their camps never advanced beyond Ajalon. But all the Shephelah rang with the exploits of Richard. Fighting his way from Carmel along the foot of the low hills, infested as they were by an enemy that perpetually assailed his long and straggling flank, Richard first established himself at Joppa, and planting forts on the spurs of the Shephelah, pushed his front gradually through it by Ramleh to Emmaus, and thence to Betenoble in the Vale of Ajalon.¹ This cost him from August, 1191, to June, 1192. He was then within twelve miles of Jerusalem as the crow flies, and on a raid he actually saw the secluded city, but he retired. His funds were exhausted, and his followers quarrelsome. He feared, too, the summer waterlessness of Jerusalem, which had compelled Cestius Gallus to withdraw in the moment of victory. But, above all, Richard's retreat from the foot of the Central Range illustrates what I have already emphasised, that to have taken the Shephelah was really to

¹ Betenoble, described in Geoffrey de Vinsauf's *Itinerary of Richard I.* (Bk. IV. ch. 34) as "near the foot of the mountains," is philologically liker the modern Beit Nabāla at the foot of the low hills, nearly four miles N.E. of Lydda, than Beit Nuba up in Ajalon at the foot of the high hills. But other references to it in the *Itinerary*, though not conclusive (V. 49, VI. 9), imply that it was well inland from Ramleh.

be no nearer to Judæa. The Crusaders fell back through their castles in the Shephelah, Emmaus, Turon or Latrun, Arnaud, Forts des Plans and de Maen, Mirabel and Montgisart¹ upon the coast. Saladin rushed after them, took Joppa, and though Richard relieved it and the coast remained with the Crusaders for some years to come, all the Shephelah, with its castles and convents, passed from Christian possession.

We have won a much more vivid imagination of the far-off campaigns of Joshua and David by following the marches of Judas Maccabeus, the rout of the Roman legions, and the advance and retreat of Richard Lionheart, —the last especially described with so much detail. The natural lines, which all these armies had to follow, remained throughout the centuries the same; the same were the difficulties of climate, forage, and locomotion; so that the best commentaries on many chapters of the Old Testament are the Books of the Maccabees, the annals of Josephus, and the Chronicles of the Crusades. History never repeats itself without explaining its past.

One point in the Northern Shephelah, round which these tides of war have swept, deserves special notice—Gezer, or Gazer. It is one of the few remarkable bastions which the Shephelah flings out to the west—on a ridge running towards Ramleh, the most prominent object in view of the traveller from Jaffa towards Jerusalem. It is high and isolated, but fertile and well watered—a very strong post

¹ We owe so much to Captain Conder for his numerous and valuable identifications that it seems ungracious to question any of them. But I do not think he has made out his case for the Crusading ruins near Antipatris being the site of Mirabel. Is this not contradicted by the statement in G. de Vinsauf's *Itinerary* that the Turks whom Richard scattered at Emmaus fled to Mirabel, that is, if Antipatris be Mirabel, north-west and towards the plains which the Christians held. Of the two suggestions, Captain Conder makes for the site of Maen (*Syrian Stone-Lore*, p. 398), the second is, of course, the correct one. Both Plans and Maen lay east of Joppa, but not east of Ramleh. Vinsauf, *Itinerary of Richard I.*, Bk. IV. ch. 29.

and striking landmark. A royal city of the Canaanites under a king of its own, Hormah, Gezer was appointed as a boundary of the tribe of Joseph, but *the Israelites drove not out the Canaanites that dwelt at Gezer*,¹ and in their hands it remained till its conquest by Egypt, when Pharaoh gave it to Solomon with his daughter, and Solomon rebuilt it.² Judas Maccabeus was strategist enough to gird himself early to the capture of Gezer, and Simon fortified it to cover the way to the harbour of Joppa, and caused John his son, the captain of the host, to dwell there.³ It was virtually, therefore, the key of Judæa, at a time when Judæa's foes came down the coast from the north; and with Joppa it formed part of the Syrian demands upon the Jews.⁴ But this is by no means the last of it. M. Clermont-Ganneau, who a number of years ago discovered the site,⁵ has lately identified Gezer with the Mont Gisart of the Crusades.⁶ Mont Gisart was a castle and fief in the county of Joppa, with an abbey of St. Katharine of Mont Gisart, "whose prior was one of the five suffragans of the Bishop of Lydda." It was the scene, on 24th November, 1174, seventeen years before the Third Crusade, of a victory won by a small army from Jerusalem under the boy-king, the leper Baldwin IV., against a very much larger army under Saladin himself, and in 1192 Saladin encamped upon it during his negotiations for a truce with Richard.⁷

Shade of King Hormah, what hosts of men have fallen about that citadel of yours! On what camps and columns has it looked down through the centuries, since first you saw the strange Hebrews burst with the sunrise across the hills and chase your countrymen down Ajalon—that day when

¹ Josh. xvi. 3, 10.

² 1 Kings ix. 15–17.

³ 1 Macc. xiii. 56.

⁴ 1 Macc. xv. 25.

⁵ By finding upon it two stones evidently dated from the time of the Macca-bees. See Pal. Expl. Fund Quarterly, 1875.

⁶ *Recueil d'Archéologie Orientale*, Paris, 1888. pp. 351–392.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

the victors felt the very sun conspiring with them to achieve the unexampled length of battle. Within sight of every Egyptian and every Assyrian invasion of the land, Gezer has also seen Alexander pass by and the legions of Rome in unusual flight, and the armies of the Cross struggle, waver and give way. If all could rise who have fallen around its base,—Ethiopians, Hebrews, Turanian soldiers of Sennacherib, Arabs, Turcomans, Greeks, Romans, Saxons—what a rehearsal of the Judgment Day it would be! Few of the travellers, who now rush across the plain, realise that the first conspicuous hill they pass in Palestine is also one of the most thickly haunted—even in that narrow land into which history has so crowded itself. But upon the ridge of Gezer no sign of all this remains except in the name Tell Gezer, and, in a sweet hollow to the north beside a fountain, where lie scattered the Christian stones of Deir Warda, the Convent of the Rose.

Up none of the other valleys of the Shephelah has history surged as up and down Ajalon and past Gezer, for none are so open to the north, nor present so easy a passage to Jerusalem.

2. The next Shephelah valley, however, the Wady Surar, or Vale of Sorek, has an importance of its own, and, remarkably enough, is to be the future road to Jerusalem. The new railway from Jaffa, instead of being carried up Ajalon, turns south at Ramleh by the pass through the low sandhills to Ekron, and thence runs up the Wady es Surar and its continuing defile through the Judæan range on to that plain south-east of Jerusalem, which probably represents the ancient Vale of Rephaim. It is the way the Philistines used to come up in the days of the Judges and of David; there is no shorter road into Judæa from Ekron, Jamnia and perhaps Ashdod.¹ Ashkelon would be better

¹ By the Wady es Surar Jerusalem is some twenty-eight miles from Ekron, thirty-two from Jamnia, thirty-eight from Ashdod, forty-five from Ashkelon.

reached—as it was by the Crusaders when they held Jerusalem—by way of the Wady es Sunt and Tell-es-Sâfiyeh.

Just before the Wady es Surar approaches the Judæan range, its great width is increased by the entrance of the Wady Ghurab. The broad basin they form was Samson's home. Zorah and Eshtaol remain, almost under their old names, on the north bank of the double Wady, with the Camp of Dan between them.¹ It is as fair a nursery for boyhood as you will find in all the land—a hillside facing south against the strong sunshine, with corn, grass, and olives, scattered boulders and winter brooks, the broad valley below with the pebbly stream and screens of oleanders, the south-west wind from the sea blowing over all. There *the child Samson grew up; and the Lord blessed him, and the Spirit of the Lord began to move him in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.* Across the Valley of Sorek, in full view, is Beth-shemesh, now "Ain Shems," House and Well of the Sun, with which name it is so natural to connect his own—Shimshon, "Sun-like." Over the low hills beyond is Timnah, where he found his first love and killed the young lion.² Further is the Philistine Plain, with its miles upon miles of corn, which, if as closely sown then as now, would require scarce three, let alone three hundred, foxes, with torches on their tails, to set it all afire. The Philistine cities are but a day's march away, by easy roads. And so from these fresh country braes to yonder plains and the highway of the great world,—from the pure home and the mother who talked with angels, and the vows of consecration, to the heathen cities, their harlots and their prisons,—we see at one sweep of the eye all the

¹ One would like to know what ancient town is represented by Artûf, a much more important site on the headland between the two Wadies.

² There are no lions now in Palestine, but they were in the Jordan Valley in the twelfth century A.D. (*Pilgrimage of the Abbot Daniel*, 1106, 1107). Leopards are still found in the neighbourhood—one was killed just before I was there—and jackals of course abound.

course in which this unregulated strength, tumbling and sporting at first with laughter like one of its native brooks, like them also ran to the flats and the mud, and being darkened and befouled, was used by men to turn their mills.¹

The plausible theory, that the story of Samson is a Sun-myth, edited for the sacred record by an orthodox Israelite, while it has at last reached the public who are interested in Old Testament criticism, is yielding among the few who fondly held it, and has never received any acceptance from the leading critics who have all been convinced more or less of the hero's historic reality.² None who study the story of Samson along with its geography, can fail to feel the reality that is in it. Unlike the exploits of the impersonations of the Solar Fire in Aryan and Semitic mythologies, those of Samson are confined to a very limited region. The attempt to interpret them all as phases and influences of the sun has broken down. To me it seems just as easy and just as foolish to read the story of this turbulent strength as the myth of a mountain-stream, at first exuberant and sparkling and sporting with its powers, but when it has left its native hills, mastered and darkened by men, and yet afterwards bursting its confinement and taking its revenge upon them. For it is rivers

¹ The other scenes of Samson's life have not been satisfactorily identified. Major Conder proposes for the rock of Etam and its *cleft* a peculiar cave at Beit Atab (*l* and *m* being interchangeable) on the Judæan plateau. But the cave at Beit Atab (I have visited the place) is too large to be described as only a *cleft*; and if Etam were so high up, the narrative would not have said, as it does (Judges xvi. 8), that Samson *went down to the rock of Etam*. Captain Conder also suggests for Ramath-Lehi and En-hakkore (Judges xv. 14 ff.) a place a little to the north of Zorah, Ayûn Abu Meharib, "fountains of the place of battles," sometimes called Ayun Kâra, "founts of a crier," where there is a chapel dedicated to Sheikh Nedhir, "the Nazarite chief," and higher up a ruin with the name 'Ism Allah, "possibly a corruption of Esma 'a Allah, 'God heard.'" All this is extremely interesting; but it looks too complete, as if we had in it not the impression of the original Samson, but the artistic grouping by some mediæval Christians of the scenes of the Samson story.

² Cf. Hitzig in his *History*; Ewald in his; Kuenen; and Budde, *Die Bücher Richter u. Samuel*, p. 133,

and not sunbeams that work mills and overthrow temples. But the idea of finding any nature myth in such a story is farfetched. As Hitzig emphasises, it is not a nature-force but a character that we have to deal with here, and, above all, the religious element in the story, so far from being a later flavour imparted to the original material, is the very life of the whole.¹

It was also about the head of Sorek that the campaign was fought in which the Philistines took the ark;² but where Eben-ezer and Aphek lay is not certain. From very early times the former has been identified with the present Deir-Aban, which overlooks the defiles from Judæa into the head of the Vale of Sorek,—a natural position for the camp of Israel at a time when the tribe of Dan had disappeared from the Shephelah below and left the higher line as Israel's frontier towards the Philistines. If Deir-Aban be Eben-ezer, then Aphek lay below it in the Shephelah, and the Israelites, in their false faith in the ark, descended there from their impregnable position and suffered a merited defeat.³

The course, however, of the ark's return is certain. It was up the broad Vale of Sorek that the untended kine of

¹ This point is well put by Von Orelli in his most judicious treatment of the whole subject in Herzog's *Real-Encyclopädie*.

² 1 Sam. iv.

³ Aphek has been placed without reason at Kh. Beled-el-Foka, in the Shephelah, south of Wady es Surar. Wellhausen (*History of Israel*, Eng. Trans., 1st ed., p. 418) would place this Aphek in Sharon (founding on another reading of Joshua xii. 18, *King of Aphek in Sharon*), opposite Dothan. But his geography is not to be relied on. He talks of the plain of Sharon *merging* into Dothan. There were several Apheks: one in the neighbourhood of Gilboa, where the Philistines encamped before the battle with Saul (1 Sam. xxix. 6); another on the plateau to the east of the Lake of Galilee, where Israel defeated the Syrians (1 Kings xx. 26, 30). Mr. J. S. Black holds these two to have been the same, and identifies them with the Aphek of Sharon (alternative reading of Josh. xii. 18. See Mr. Black's *Smaller Camb. Bible for Schools* on that verse). The whole subject of the Apheks of the Old Testament deserves separate treatment, and I hope to return to it. It is singular that twice over Philistines should encamp against Israel at an Aphek.

Beth-shemesh dragged the ark behind them, cropping the barley as they went, and lowing the frequent signal of their coming to the reapers at the top of the valley. The new site, suggested with so much reason for Kirjath-jearim, Khurbet 'Erma, lies at the entrance to Judæa.

3. The next valley that cuts the Shephelah is the Wady es Sunt, from the head of which the narrow Wady el Jindy takes you up through the Central Range to the neighbourhood of Bethlehem. The Wady es Sunt is probably the Vale of Elah.¹ Its entrance from the Philistine Plain is commanded by the famous Tell-es-Safiyeh, the Blanchegarde of the Crusaders, whose high white front looks west across the plain twelve miles to Ashdod. Blanchegarde must always have been a very strong position, and it is simply inability to assign to the site any other Biblical town—for Libnah has no satisfactory claims—that makes the case so strong for its having been the site of Gath. Blanchegarde is twenty-three miles from Jerusalem, but the way up is most difficult after you leave the Wady es Sunt. It is a remarkable fact that when Richard decided to besiege Jerusalem, and had already marched from Ascalon to Blanchegarde on his way, instead of then pursuing the Wady es Sunt and its narrow continuation to Bethlehem, he preferred to turn north two days' march across the Shephelah hills with his flank to the enemy, and to attack his goal up the Valley of Ajalon.²

An hour's ride from Tell-es-Safiyeh up the winding Vale of Elah brings us to its head, where the Wady el Jindy comes down from near Bethlehem, and the Wady es Sur from opposite Hebron.³ At the junction there is a level plain of a quarter of a mile broad cut by three brooks, which combine to form the stream down Wady es Sunt.

¹ 1 Sam. xvii. 2.

² Geoffrey de Vinsauf, *Itinerary* V. 48 pp.

³ The Wady es Sur and Wady es Sunt are really one and the same valley.

This plain is probably the scene of David's encounter with Goliath; for to the south of it, on the low range that bounds the Wady es Sunt in that direction, is the name Shuweikeh, probably the Shocoh, on which the Philistines rested their rear and faced the Israelites across the valley.¹ Major Conder recognises the "Gai," or ravine, which separated them² in the deep trench that the combined stream has cut through the level land: and this is another article in the cumulative evidence for the site. To Major Conder's admirable picture of the disposition of the armies I may add the following: Shocoh is a strong position isolated from the rest of the ridge; and it keeps open the line of retreat down the valley. Saul's army was probably not immediately opposite, but a little way up on the slopes of the incoming Wady el Jindy, and so placed that the Philistines in attacking it must cross not only the level land and the main stream, but one of the two other streams as well, and must also climb the slopes for some distance. Both positions were thus very strong, and this fact perhaps explains the long hesitation of the armies in face of each other, even though the Philistines had the advantage of Goliath. The Israelite position certainly looks the stronger. It is interesting, too, that from its rear the narrow pass goes right up to the interior of the land near Bethlehem; so that the shepherd-boy, whom the story represents as being sent by his father for news of the battle,—and who, when he came, turned the even balance between these two strong positions by a little pebble—would have almost twelve miles to cover between his father's house and the camp.

4. The fourth of the valleys that cut the Shephelah, is that now named the Wady el 'Afranj, which runs from opposite Hebron north-west to Ashdod and the coast. It is important as containing the real capital of the Shephelah,

¹ *Tent Work*, p. 279.

² 1 Sam. xvii. 3.

the present Beit-Gibrin. This site has not been identified with any Old Testament name, but, like so many other places in Palestine, its permanent importance is illustrated by its use during Roman times, and also during the Crusades. It was a centre of the Idumæans when they extended north across the Shephelah in the last centuries before Christ. The Romans fortified it, and the roads they built from it in all directions are still visible among the brushwood and cornfields of the neighbouring valleys. Septimius Severus gave it certain rights, from which it received the new name Eleutheropolis, and it became the centre of a Christian see. During the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, Gibelin, as the place was called, was the Crusader's base against Ascalon, and Fulke of Anjou built the citadel. The remains of this and of a great church still impress the squalid village with some sense of grandeur. Hard by there is the noble ruin of Sandahanna, church and cloister of Saint Anne, the mother of the virgin. The chalk ridges are penetrated by vast caves, elaborately carved, perhaps once the dwelling of the ancient Horites; certainly in later times the refuge of Christians, whose marks they yet bear. The mouths of those caves that look south have a glorious view across Mareshah, Moresheth Gath, and the site of Lachish to Gaza and the sea. But it was the straight, solid Roman roads that interested me most about Beit-Gibrin; for there is little doubt that it was by one of them, or rather by one of the previous highways they represent, that the eunuch of Queen Candace, either before or after his baptism, passed home in his chariot.

5. The last of the valleys through the Shephelah is Wady el Hesy, or Wady el Jizàir, running from a point about six miles south-west of Hebron to the sea, between Gaza and Ascalon. This valley also has its important sites; for Lachish, which used to be placed at Umm

Lakis on the slopes to the south of it, is now, since Mr. Flinders Petrie's excavations, more clearly identified with Tell el Hesy, a mound in the bed of it, and Eglon is close by.

Above Lachish, some five miles to the Wells of Qassâba or Wells of the Reeds, there is usually wealth of water, and all the year round a stream.¹ Latin Chronicles of the Crusades know the place as Cannetum Esturnellorum, or "The Canebrake of the Starlings." Richard twice made it a base of operations: once on coming up the Wady el Hesy from the coast after taking Darum, when he advanced on Beit-Gibrin, and once again when he came to intercept, in the Wady esh Sheria, a rich caravan on its way from Egypt to Jerusalem. The description of these two operations² helps us to realise the importance of Lachish and its Wady in Old Testament times. Lachish covered Gaza, as well as the coast road to Egypt, and the inland road by Beersheba.

I have now explained the strategic importance of the Shephelah, and especially of the five valleys that are the only possibilities of passage through it for great armies. How much of the history of all these centuries can be localised along one or other of them! and when we have done so, how much more vivid that history becomes!

There is one great campaign in the Shephelah, which I have not discussed in connection with any of the main routes, because the details of it are obscure—Sennacherib's invasion of Syria in 701 B.C. But the general course of it, as told in the Assyrian annals and the Bible, becomes plain in the light of the geography we have been studying. Sennacherib, coming down the coast, like the Syrians and Crusaders, like them also conquered first the towns about

¹ Clermont-Ganneau: *Recueil*, etc., 378.

² Vinsauf: *Itinerarium*, V. 41, VI. 4.

Joppa.¹ Then he defeated an Egyptian army before Alteku, somewhere near Ekron, on the Philistine Plain,² and took Ekron and Timnah. With Egypt beaten back, and the northern Shephelah mastered, the way was now open into Judah, the invasion of which and the investment of Jerusalem accordingly appear next in the list of Sennacherib's triumphs. These must have been effected by a detachment of the Assyrian army, for Sennacherib himself is next heard of in the southern Shephelah, besieging Lachish and Libnah, no doubt with the view of securing his way to Egypt. At Lachish he received the tribute of Hezekiah, who thus hoped to purchase the relief of the still inviolate Jerusalem; but in spite of the tribute, he sent to Hezekiah from Lachish and Libnah two peremptory demands for her surrender. Then the Assyrian army was smitten, not, as we usually imagine, round the walls of Jerusalem, for the Bible nowhere implies that, but under Sennacherib himself in the main camp and headquarters, which either were still in the southern Shephelah, or, if we may believe Herodotus, had crossed the desert to Pelusium, and were overtaken in that pestiferous region, that has destroyed so many armies.

GEORGE ADAM SMITH.

¹ See *Records of the Past*, First Series, Vol. I., and Vol. I. of Schrader's *Cuneiform Inscriptions and the O.T.* I gave an account of this campaign in illustration of the relevant prophecies of Isaiah (Isaiah: *Expositor's Bible*, Vol. I. chapters xix.-xxiii.), which I still think to be justified by the data of the Bible, the Assyrian annals, and Herodotus ii. 14., and more correct than Schrader's view, which makes the crisis of the campaign the Battle of Eltekeh.

² Alteku, the Eltekeh of Joshua xix. 44, cannot be where the survey map suggests, up the vale of Ajalon,—for how could an Assyrian and Egyptian army have met there?—but was near Ekron, and on the route to Egypt. Kh. Lezka is the only modern name there at all like it.