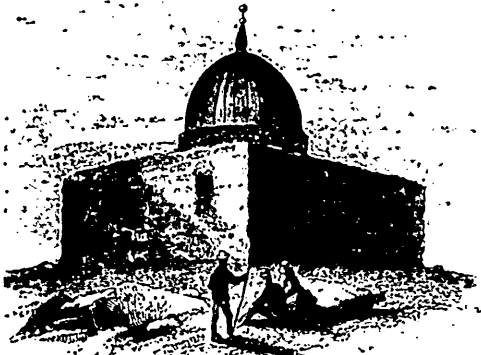


THE LORD'S LAND.

BY REV. H. B. RIDGAWAY, D.D.



Tomb of Aaron.

IN the valley of Edom, just where the principal rock-hewn tombs or temples begin, the eye is first arrested by a huge pyramidal structure of Egyptian order on the left, and then right and left, especially on the right, the whole mountain cut into streets and tombs. But as my companions were already penetrating the rocky enclosure, I was obliged to hasten on. The cliffs rise from eighty to three hundred feet on each side, frequently not more than twelve feet apart, and seem almost to touch at their summits, or to approach so near as to leave only a small opening through which the blue sky looked trebly blue, or a few sunbeams straggled down to light up the hidden treasury of nature and of art. On—on—my amazement growing with every step, as each new turn brought a fresh surprise. Under my feet were stones of the old road-bed, and on either side were the twisting canals hewn in the face of the rock, along which pure water flowed into the city. Still on, for a mile, I wandered amid the winding maze; tombs on the right of me, tombs on the left of me; many of them rude and simple, others of elaborate design; till all at once I came to an open space, and a large, magnificent temple stood immediately before me. Beginning now to feel the qualms of hunger, and suspecting the camp was near by, I walked on till I found it pitched by the stream near the point where the wady widens into the open plain on which the ancient city, was built.

In the afternoon, with a native guide, we passed rapidly through the site of the city, following the course of the stream until we struck a small wady from the north-west, along the general direction of which we ascended.

In the morning we returned up through the Sik to the point where the rock tombs begin. The first and principal one is on the right of the wady and fronting east. It is reached by a long, winding path. There we found a front gateway a quadrilateral court forty-five feet square, side porticoes, two columns of the Doric order, columns about the doorway also Doric, heavy and massive; the interior thirty-six feet square, with side niches. Following the wady, the mountain side on the right is pierced here and there by streets or alley-ways from which shoot out galleries lined with tombs of all descriptions. Some of these bear evidence of being occupied by the Arabs in the winter. They are perfectly dry, and in the cold, rainy season must afford good shelter. Just before the gateway is reached there is an elevated plateau extending on the right to some distance. There is inexhaustible room for tombs. I observed one square column twelve feet wide, with a door below. On the area immediately in front of the gateway are the marks of a once extensive temple.

Our next objective point was Mount Hor, Jebel Harun. It lay immediately before us on the right. We dismounted and ascended on the east side to the summit, four thousand two hundred feet above the sea level, in about one hour and fifteen minutes. The climb would not have been hard had we not been obliged to make it with the hot afternoon sun upon us. Coming first to a wide plateau, we then from the west side made the top of the larger cone by a very steep stairway,

partly natural and partly artificial. The pathway passes over a large, deep cistern of water. On the top there is a small mosque, about thirty-five by thirty-two feet, popularly known as Aaron's Tomb. From the top of the mosque there is a superb view in all directions. Near are the rich sandstone cliffs in which Petra nestles; bounding the eastern horizon is the long line of Jebel Wady Musá; stretching southerly is the Sherah range and the valley of the Arabah; in front, westerly, is the same valley, with its streaks of white and green, the Tih Mountains, and the Wilderness of the Forty Years' Wandering beyond; and northerly the heights of the hill country of Judea and the mountains of Moab, with the waters of the Dead Sea lying between them. How simple and yet how affecting, the narrative of Aaron's death. See Num. xx. 23—28. Aaron was denied entrance into the Promised Land, but he had a sublime spot in which to die—one worthy of his dignity, and from which, when dying, his aged eyes could catch at least a glimpse of the beautiful country for which he had so ardently longed.

The next morning, April 8, we found ourselves encamped near the mouth of Wady el Abyad. Before starting we were instructed by our conducting sheik, Arb, that we must all keep close together, as there was an old feud between the Petra tribe and the tribe through which we were about to pass. Two and a-half hours brought us to the Arabah, and then for the rest of the day our course lay north-westerly across it.

That evening, from a little hill by our camp, I looked back toward Edom. Its peaks, with Mount Hor in the foreground glowing in the crimson sunset, formed a marked contrast with the soft haze of the white limestone cliffs of the Tih, which we had now approached. Here was 'Ain Weibeh, the supposed Kadesh-barnea of Scripture. From this point the spies were sent by Moses to search the land of Canaan. Here Israel made their fatal choice, and falling through unbelief, failed of the promise.

Our route the next day lay through and across a succession of wadies running down into the Arabah, some of which were broad and quite verdant, and so full of acacias as to give the effect of apple orchards. At four o'clock in the afternoon we encamped, about two hours from the foot of Nagb Sufah, the scriptural Zephath. Num. xxi. 17, Judges i. 17.

In the morning came a tremendous tag. At the foot of the Pass Sufah most of us dismounted, and walked up the mountain. It was as much as our pack camels could do to get up and over the mountain. By half-past twelve o'clock p.m. we were safely on the Pass, and lunched in the crevices of the rocks. One hour more brought us to Wady Teraieih, where the Arabs, by digging two or three feet in the sand, obtained good water, rather cloudy, but sweet and cool. Our thirst was terrible; it seemed impossible to drink enough. For two and a-half hours more we rode along a rolling plain, through the Pass Nagb el Muzeikah, and halted on a pleasant slope near which are ruins called Kurnub, probably the ancient Thamara. We were now fairly in the Negeb, or South Country. Here are the southernmost limits of the Promised Land. At Ararah we found two wells with water, and several dry ones, but no ruins marking the site of the town. The valley is fertile and beautiful. To the inhabitants of Aroer David sent a portion of the spoils of the captured Amalekites, who had committed a raid on Ziklag, and burned it with fire. The identification of Aroer shows the field of David's operations in the extreme South Country. While he himself was outlawed by Saul, he became the protector of Simeon and Judah from the incursions of the wandering hordes of the Desert. At Milh, two hours north-east, there are some ruins—a Gothic tower standing, but half buried. That a ruined church is under the soil is not only possible but probable. There are also outlying ruins on an adjacent hill, covering a circuit of half-a-mile in extent. Milh is the Scriptural Moladah (Josh. xv. 26; xix. 2), mentioned by Josephus as Malatha. A half-hour to the north, at the foot of Tell Milh, are the wells of Milh. There are two wells, about thirty feet deep and twelve by fifteen wide. Around lay a dozen stone watering troughs, and over them stood the Arabs and their cattle. They are walled up with limestone in the most substantial manner. An evidence of their age may be found in the fact that the indentations in the stones at their mouth, caused by the friction of drawing the water by ropes, measured from four to six inches. These particular stones could not have been laid by Abraham, as the dragoman of our English companions asserted; but it is not improbable that the wells were dug by some one of the patriarchs. We were