

ARTICLE V.

IDENTIFICATION OF SUCCOTH AND PENUEL.

BY REV. SELAH MERRILL, D.D., ANDOVER, MASS.

THESE places are mentioned in the Bible in connection with such men and events as to make their identification a matter of peculiar interest and importance. Although the references to them are clear and explicit, it has at the same time required an unusual amount of study and research to find a definite and reliable clew to their location. And this remark applies with equal force to other sites east of the Jordan of which we have notices in the Bible. If sometimes there appears to be confusion in such biblical notices, it arises not from ignorance or carelessness on the part of the sacred writers, but from our inability to obtain the key to the topography of the country at the particular periods of history when those writers lived. The number of puzzling questions in biblical geography that have already been solved by patient research is something remarkable, and encourages us to hope that by a thorough exploration of the country we shall be able to locate with absolute or approximate certainty the larger part of those biblical sites which still remain unidentified. Among the places that have been brought to light by recent and careful researches carried on in the country itself I may mention, besides Succoth and Penuel, Horonaim, the Cities of the Plain, Ephron of the Maccabees, "the land of Tob" where Jephthah was living when called to be captain and judge of Israel, Golan, "the wood of Ephraim" where the battle took place between the forces of David and Absalom, Pella, Jabesh Gilead, and Tishbi the home of Elijah. It is hoped that the details with regard to the identification of these and other places will, when published, prove of interest to the students of the Bible.

I dislike to say anything that shall appear like a criticism of so eminent a biblical scholar as Dr. Grove, yet it seems to me that in his Article in Smith's Bible Dictionary he has misunderstood Burckhardt's account of "Sukkot." Burckhardt (p. 345, note) says: "Near where we crossed, to the south, are the ruins of Sukkot." There can be no doubt that the whole paragraph from which this sentence is taken refers to the west bank of the Jordan; for it begins with the Lake of Tiberias, and ends with Jericho. Dr. Grove, however, supposes that Burckhardt refers to a place on the east side of the river. But it will be noticed that in his text (pp. 345, 346), after he has crossed the river, he gives with great minuteness the names of all wadies, ruins, and tombs between the crossing and the Zerka or Jabbok, and among them Sukkot is not mentioned. Burckhardt did not himself visit Sukkot. Dr. Robinson and Mr. Van de Velde visited a place on the west of the river, about ten miles south of Beisan, which they call "Sakut," which, instead of being as Dr. Grove thinks, "entirely distinct both in name and position from that of Burckhardt," is certainly identical with it. In like manner, the Rev. W. Wright, formerly a missionary in Damascus, in some popular papers upon the Hauran in the *Leisure Hour* for 1874 (p. 599, col. 1), makes a similar mistake, and takes it for granted that Burckhardt's Sukkot was on the east of the river. He says: "Jerome places Succoth east of the Jordan, opposite Scythopolis, at the place where Burckhardt found its ruins." But in reality, Burckhardt found no ruins, and the place he heard of was on the west of the river.

But, independently of these writers, neither of whom has been on the ground, I can testify that in the portion of the valley opposite Beisan there are no ruins, nor, further, are there anywhere on the eastern side of the river any ruins bearing the name of Succoth, or any name that might correspond to it. In the division of the country under Joshua (xiii. 27) Succoth was allotted to the tribe of Gad, and hence must certainly have been on the east of the river. Jerome

seems to know of a town named Succoth which was "beyond the Jordan."¹ The Talmud, in its physical divisions of Perea, adopts those of the Bible, namely, "Beth Haram, Beth Nimrah, Succoth, and Zaphon," which makes Succoth a district as well as a town, and fixes it on the east of the river (Neubauer, pp. 247, 433). Again, in Gideon's pursuit of Zebah and Zalmunna, it was after he had crossed the Jordan, going south and east, that he came to Succoth (Judges viii. 5-17).

It has seemed necessary to state the foregoing facts carefully and in detail, because Dr. Robinson has, carelessly perhaps, given the weight of his great name to the groundless theory that the Succoth of the Bible was on the west of the Jordan, whereas it is certainly on the east side of that river.

Dr. Grove is right in saying that the "Sakut" of Robinson is too far north, and entirely out of the way of any route leading from the Jabbok to Shechem. This writer's conclusion (derived from Gen. xxxii. 30 ; xxxiii. 18) that Succoth lay between Penuel (on the Jabbok) and Shechem is correct, and also important, and if borne in mind will help us in its identification.

The next step in this discussion is to notice the physical divisions of the valley east of the river, as stated in the Bible (Josh. xiii. 27), and repeated, as I have already said, in the Talmud ; namely, "Beth Haram, Beth Nimrah, and Succoth." Beth Haram is the vast oasis of the Shittim plain at the north end of the Dead Sea. Beth Nimrah is the oasis immediately north of the Shittim plain, and which appears to be really a part of it when looked at from the neighboring hills. From wady Nimrin northward to the Jabbok there are no fountains or streams, and that portion of the valley is entirely desolate and barren, except during the rainy season. About the mouth of the Jabbok there is a plain of great extent and fertility ; and this is the Succoth region of the Talmud ; and here, if anywhere, we are to seek for the Succoth of Jacob and Gideon and Jerome.

¹ Quæst. in Gen. xxxiii. 17.

But have we any clew as to the precise locality which bore the name of Succoth? I think we have, and, further, I think that this interesting biblical site can be identified beyond any reasonable dispute. The Talmud states definitely that in its time Succoth was called "Ter'alah," and in the great plain north of the Jabbok, about one mile from the stream and about three miles from where the river leaves the hills, there is a large mound or tell which bears the name of Der 'ala. The letters correspond to those of the Hebrew word, except that *t* in Hebrew becomes *d* in Arabic—a change of very frequent occurrence. There are places in other sections of the country bearing the name of Der 'ala; but in this case, the fact of its being found in this particular locality, considered in connection with the testimony of the Talmud, is more than a coincidence. Adjoining this tell is a smaller one—a kind of shoulder—on which there are at present some ruins with a few columns. The principal mound is so thickly covered with broken pottery that it could be raked into heaps. I picked up, as I passed over the tell, as many as twenty specimens of different kinds and qualities of pottery. On one side of the tell some animal had burrowed, which enabled me to examine the soil for at least four feet below the surface; and I was surprised to find that the broken pottery extended all through it. I was anxious to make some cuttings into this mound, but had neither time nor means to do so. The Bedawin living in that region have a tradition that a city existed upon that mound in ancient times. This I mention incidentally, attaching to it no special weight.

Among the facts brought to light in this region during my researches is that of a ford or crossing of the Jabbok some distance to the east of Tel Der 'ala, but before the hills are reached, which bears the name of "Mashra'a Canaan," i.e. *Canaan's Crossing*. Canaan may here be a man's name or the name of the country, and the words may mean "the crossing which leads to Canaan." But either way this discovery is very interesting and important, because, as I shall

soon show, the course of the Jabbok is the only feasible route by which the caravans of commerce and the swarms of Midianites from the east and south could reach the country of the Hebrews on the west of the Jordan.

If we examine the account of Gideon's pursuit of the Midianites, we may get some hints as to where we should look for Penuel. After their terrible midnight rout in the valley of Jezreel, a remnant escaped, amounting to about fifteen thousand men. These Gideon pursued. "And Gideon came to Jordan and passed over, he and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them. And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me, for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian. And the men of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army? And Gideon said, Therefore, when the Lord hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then will I tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers. And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise; and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him. And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower" (Judges viii. 4-9).

These "children of the East" keep to the lowlands, plains, and the good roads. They come down from the deserts of Arabia; they follow the course of the Jabbok to the Jordan; they move up the Jordan valley till nearly opposite Beisan, and then cross, and spread themselves, "like grasshoppers for multitude," over the great Esdraelon plain. After the rout just referred to, they retrace their steps, hotly pursued by one of the heroes of Hebrew history. Gideon crosses the Jordan by one of the fords near Beisan, hurries down the Jordan valley as far as Succoth, and halts there to rest and refresh his weary, but resolute band. The men of Succoth reason with themselves: "We live on the great army route between Canaan and the East, and it will not do for us

to show a decided friendship for Gideon; for if we do, and he is unsuccessful, we shall bring upon our heads the terrible vengeance of the Midianites. Our own safety demands that we be strictly neutral." The men of Penuel, living on the same great thoroughfare, were actuated by similar motives, and likewise refused to assist Gideon.

It will be noticed, from verse 8 of the chapter just quoted, that Gideon *goes up* from Succoth, evidently leaving the Jordan and turning into the mountains to the east. But we know with absolute certainty, from the account of Jacob's return (Gen. xxxii.), that Penuel was somewhere on the line of the Jabbok; and hence we are justified in concluding that Gideon on this occasion followed the course of that stream.

The impression that I get from reading this eighth chapter of Judges is, that Penuel was at no great distance from Succoth, although there are no certain hints to prove this beyond dispute. The points that have been hitherto established with certainty are: 1. that Penuel is on the line of the Jabbok; and 2. that below Penuel, near where the stream leaves the hills, there is a ford called "Canaan's crossing." It is also established beyond any reasonable doubt that Succoth is situated a little to the west of this crossing and north of the Jabbok. So far everything seems to corroborate Dr. Grove's conclusion, noticed above, that Succoth must be somewhere between Penuel and Shechem. If Succoth is where I have placed it, it will be on the direct route between the Jabbok and Nablûs, or Shechem, by way of the Damia ford.

But we have still an interesting hint with regard to Penuel in the life of Jeroboam. After the division of the kingdom "Jeroboam built Shechem in Mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel" (1 Kings xii. 25). It will be remembered that Gideon, in his threat to the men of Penuel, says: "I will break down this tower,"—as if a tower or fortress were a principal feature of the place. This leads to the suggestion, which is confirmed by all the circumstances connected with the case,

that Penuel was a frontier fortress, built on the great thoroughfare from the East for the purpose of repelling invasions from that quarter. When Jeroboam comes into possession of his kingdom he feels the need of a defence on that side, and hence one of his first acts is "to go out" and rebuild Penuel, which lay almost directly east from his capital. Otherwise invading bands or hosts might pour down the valley of the Jabbok, cross the Jordan by the Damia ford, and sweep up what is now called wady Farifa, and attack him in his royal residence. The rebuilding of Penuel was evidently of such importance to the nation as to demand the personal attention of the king, and such as to receive special mention in the annals of his reign.

In the account of Jacob's journey after he had parted with Esau it is said: "And Jacob came to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle" (Gen. xxxiii. 17). Even to this day the fertile fields along the mouth of the Jabbok are the favorite resort of the powerful tribes which occupy the eastern plains; for here they find abundant pasture for their numerous flocks and herds. They could not go south of the Jabbok, and very seldom do they go very far north of it; but if they desire to find pasture for their cattle they go directly to the Succoth region. The same physical conditions exist now that existed in Jacob's time; and, coming from the East with his sheep and cattle and camels, he went at once to Succoth, where he abode perhaps for a considerable period.

I have alluded to the valley of the Jabbok as being the main thoroughfare from the eastern plains to the land of Canaan. There is more evidence for this than perhaps would occur to the casual reader. When Gideon pursued the Midianites from Succoth up through the eastern hills on to the plains beyond, he "went up," it is said, "by the way of them that dwelt in tents,"¹ i.e. went up by the route which such people usually took — as if they were confined to one route, or had, at least, a favorite route by which to ap-

¹ Judges viii. 11 : וַיֵּצֵא גִדְיוֹן אֶת-הַיָּבֹדֵק בְּאֶחָדָם

proach the country on the west of the Jordan. The apparently incidental circumstance which the words just quoted record did not assume in my mind the importance which they now have until I had been back and forth over all that region several times, and followed the whole course of the Jabbok from its source to where it enters the Jordan. North of the Jabbok there is no other possible route until the valley of 'Ajlûn is reached; and this is altogether out of the question, if considered as a thoroughfare for the "children of the East" on their way to Canaan. South of the Jabbok, again, as far as the line of the Dead Sea and Hasban, there is no feasible route by which to descend from the eastern plains to the Jordan valley. This mountainous region is intersected by several deep wadies, along which paths lead, to be sure, but which could never have been followed by large caravans, and least of all used as military routes by the hosts that made their periodical invasions of the West. Besides, I am of the opinion that all this hilly region was in ancient times clothed with forests, which would preclude the passage of any "host" on its way to Canaan. This region is now in many parts covered with a thick growth of pine and oak, and the whole of it would in a hundred years be covered with a dense forest were not the young trees constantly destroyed. On the whole, I judge that the phrase "the way of those dwelling in tents" refers to a well-known route that had been followed for ages. Often these eastern invaders not only made the highways in Canaan unsafe, — as we learn from the Book of Judges, — but rendered it almost impossible for the Hebrews to cultivate their land or to gather any crops. "Because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strongholds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the East, even they came up against them: And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth till thou come to Gaza; and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor ass. For they came up

with their cattle and their tents. And they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number; and they entered into the land to destroy it. And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord" (Judges vi. 2-6). The terrible distress at a certain period here pictured was repeated, with less severity perhaps, at intervals during many centuries of the Hebrew history.

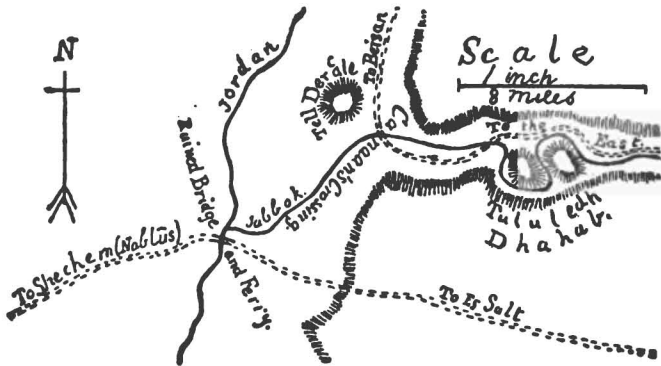
With regard to their route it may be said, 1. That such a people as are here under consideration do not, when they move in large masses with their flocks and herds, go over difficult hills if there is a better road, even if this should be somewhat longer. 2. From a thorough personal examination of the country, I think I can say with truth that neither to the north nor to the south of the Jabbok is there any other feasible route by which to enter Canaan from the plains and deserts of Arabia. 3. Along the course of the Jabbok these people were sure of a good and easy road for themselves and their camels. 4. Here they would always be sure of grass for their flocks. 5. Here they would always be sure of abundance of water.

It is on this great thoroughfare that we suppose Penuel, a frontier tower or fortress, to have been built, in the earliest times, in order to repel invasions from the East. Jeroboam, as we have seen, felt the need of defence on that side, and therefore he rebuilt Penuel. This frontier fortress may have played a more important part in the history of those troublous times than we at present have any conception of. How many times the garrison was successful in repelling invasions, or how many times they must yield to superior numbers, and allow the desert hosts to sweep on to plunder their fatherland, we cannot even guess.

But can Penuel itself be located with any certainty? In my judgment the possible places that can represent Penuel are reduced to a single locality, which I will proceed to describe:

About one hour and twenty minutes, or say four miles,

above Canaan's ford or crossing, following the course of the stream, there is one of the most singular formations in Syria. At this point the valley is quite narrow, and its walls are precipitous. In a line with the valley, the course of which is from east to west, there spring from its lowest level and rise to a height of two hundred and fifty feet *two conical hills*. One of these sugar-loaf hills is on one side of the stream, and the other is on the other side, and the stream winds about them in a peculiar manner as will be seen by the accompanying chart. The sides of these mounds are steep,



and it took me fifteen minutes to reach the summit of one of them. These hills are called at present Tulul edh-Dhahab, or "Hills of Gold." The inhabitants of the region can give no account of the origin of the name. They speak of a place on the side of one of the tells from which a strong current of air issues at times; but I did not remain there long enough to investigate the matter. The prevailing stone or rock upon the tells is a yellow sandstone, which one might fancy to resemble gold, and the modern name may have arisen from this fact. On both these tells there are extensive and ancient ruins. The one to the west is larger than the other, and has upon it more ruins; but the ruins upon the one to the east are remarkable. They consist of the ruins of buildings on the summit, and of a long wall of massive stones which runs from the summit to the foot of the mound on the southwest

side. The hill at this side is so steep that it is a marvel to me how the wall could have been built. In addition to this wall there is, about half way up the mound, or a little less, a great platform, running along the side of the hill for several hundred feet, which is supported by a wall of great strength and solidity. In some places this wall is fifteen and twenty feet in height, and one portion of it is still quite perfect for a distance of over one hundred feet. The walls which remain have a substantial appearance, and the platform referred to was probably the foundation of a castle or fortress. Whatever the nature of the structures once standing here may have been, they could have been built, considering the nature of the ground and the size of the stones, only at enormous expense. The work is certainly not Moslem, nor does it appear to be Roman; while the great unhewn stones would seem to classify it more properly with the ancient Cyclopean work, which still exists in a very few places — perhaps half a dozen — in the country east of the Jordan. This, if anywhere on the Jabbok, would be the most suitable place for a frontier fortress, and such, we have reason to believe, was Penuel. A fact which seems to indicate that this may have been Penuel is that on the whole line of this great thoroughfare which followed the Jabbok there are no ruins, except ruined mills here and there, until Kalat Zerka is reached, fifty or sixty miles from the mouth of the river. At this point the Haj road touches the Zerka, and this castle was built for the protection and convenience of the pilgrims to Mecca. If this is Penuel, the ruins are certainly such as would justify Jeroboam in recording in his public annals the fact of his having rebuilt the place.¹

¹ Prof. Kiepert on his "Neue Wandkarte" (1874), and his "Neue Handkarte" (1875), puts down the word Peniel — followed in each case by an interrogation mark — among the hills at some distance south of the Zerka; and this fact has led an anonymous writer in the *New York Independent* for July 26, 1877, to suppose that Penuel is to be sought for at that point. But if this writer had read my Report on the Jordan Valley in the "Fourth Statement of the Palestine Exploration Society," or examined my map which accompanies the report, he would have learned that all the valley, including the foot-hills, between Wady Nimrin and the Zerka is a barren region, and destitute of ruins. I locate Penuel

What I have called the "Succoth region" answers very appropriately to the "valley of Succoth," in Ps. lx. (repeated in cviii.). This Psalm appears to refer to some victory, or to the wresting some portions of the fatherland out of the hands of their enemies. Putting Succoth where there are valid reasons for locating it, the order of places is very natural; namely, "Shechem, the valley of Succoth [in the direct line towards Gilead], Gilead, and Manasseh."

A theory hardly worth noticing has been advanced, which proposes to identify the Jabbok with wady Yabis. But in reply it may be said, that Eusebius and Jerome locate the Jabbok between Gerash and Amman, places that are perfectly well-known. Again, Josephus, in describing the boundaries of that portion of the Amorite territory which constituted the kingdom of Sihon, says that it naturally resembled an island, being bounded by rivers on the south, north, and west (Ant. 4, 5, 2); and he might have added, on the east, as well. The river Jabbok formed the northern boundary. How would any writer pass over two vast wadies like those of the Zerka and the 'Ajlûn, and mention the Yabis,—which is smaller than either of these, and contains but a comparatively small stream,—as a "river" forming the northern boundary of a province which (we know from other sources) at no point, except in the Jordan valley, extended so far north? Further, the word "Yabis" is well known to be a relic of the Hebrew word "Jabesh." Besides, the theory that the Yabis is the ancient Jabbok is, in a word, simply impossible.

With regard to the name Penuel or Peniel, I am pretty well convinced, since I have been over the ground and examined the strange physical conformation there existing, that it is connected in its origin with that remarkable phenomenon. Dr. Grove has already anticipated me in referring

a few miles west of the Burma crossing, in the valley of the Jabbok, and on the stream itself; while Kiepert's doubtful Peniel is, on the latest of the two maps just noticed, fully ten miles away in a straight line, and twelve or more by any available path, and on the south side of Jebel Mesara. Furthermore, Prof. Kiepert has told me himself that he had no certain data for placing the name where he has.

to a similar fact occurring in another section of the country: "The promontory of Ras esh Shukah, on the coast of Syria above Beirût, was formerly called "Theouprosopon," *face of God*, probably a translation of Peniel, or its Phœnician equivalent" (Smith's Bible Dictionary, Article *Peniel*). An Oriental people would easily persuade themselves that such a place as the Hills of Gold marked the site of some special manifestation of Deity, and would give it a name accordingly. And as the same name is frequently given a second time to one and the same place, the foregoing remarks can be made without invalidating or obscuring in the slightest degree the truth and beauty of that incident in the life of Jacob where the process of giving this particular name was a second time repeated.

From the ruins and summits of these strange tells, as my eye followed the course of the valley east and west, I felt that I was looking down upon the very route along which the ancient "sons of the East" passed with their camels,— a wild throng from the desert, on their way to the land of Canaan; or by which they returned, either laden with plunder gathered from the Hebrews on the west of the Jordan, or, as sometimes happened, a fugitive rabble—the mere wreck of a host,—beaten and ruined by the bravery of some Old Testament hero. Succoth and Penuel are interesting places in the geography of Palestine because they are associated with the life of Jacob. Here at Penuel the patriarch wrestled all night with a strange messenger, and at sunrise he passed on to meet his brother. Esau came from the south along this very road, and somewhere not far from this spot, probably, was the scene of the famous meeting and reconciliation between them. It was at Succoth that Jacob rested for a season on his way to Canaan after his injured father-in-law and brother had been appeased and the offending one had by them been forgiven. Succoth and Penuel are associated, again, in the life of Gideon, and the details of this event suggest to the careful student many valuable lessons.