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

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

THE VIEW FROM MOUNT NEBO.

THE view from Mount Nebo has been often and, in many respects, adequately described, yet when I came to look upon it, I found myself entirely unprepared for the feature which most arrested my attention. It is my present purpose to describe this feature, to indicate what it involves, and to consider some of the consequences that follow when it is duly appreciated.

To the full and accurate descriptions of what is to be seen from Mount Nebo, given by Col. Conder,¹ it would be difficult to add; but the very fullness of the description is only too likely to conceal, or at least to throw into undue subordination, the *limitation* of the view. Taking for granted, then, that the various points enumerated by Col. Conder are visible from Mount Nebo, I shall attempt in the first instance to indicate the nature and extent of this limitation, and, in so doing, to distinguish (while stating both) between impressions which naturally differ with different observers, and objective facts which remain the same for all, and, as such, can be appreciated no less away from the spot than on it.

It is unnecessary to discuss the question whether Jebel Nebā, which rises nearly 4,000 feet above the Dead Sea, and lies some ten miles due east of its north-eastern extremity, is the particular Moabite summit named Mount Nebo in the Old Testament. The identification has been commonly accepted since Dr. Tristram, in 1864, discovered that the name of Nebā attached to this point, and convincingly

¹ *Heth and Moab*, 134-9 (cited in *Survey of Eastern Palestine*, i. pp. 199 ff.): *Palestine*, 158-61.

criticized the identification with Jebel Aṭṭārūs, a somewhat loftier summit, ten miles further south, and by so much more distant from the steppes of Moab, which had previously been chief claimant to be the site of Mount Nebo. The feature in the view from Jebel Nebā, which I am about to discuss, must be not less conspicuous in views from any other point along the western edge of the plateau of Moab, from which no point rises sufficiently higher than Jebel Nebā to affect the following argument. For the present, too, I will postpone the consideration of identifications which, disregarding the direct statement of Deuteronomy xxxii. 49 (cp. xxxiv. 5), place Mount Nebo outside Moab.

Doubtless the impression made on the observer by the view from Jebel Nebā differs according to the direction from which the summit is approached. The plateau rises slightly towards its western edge, so that there is no view westward till the edge is reached. Consequently on one riding off the plateau to one of its projecting headlands, the view bursts suddenly in its depth and extent. On the other hand, riding up from the Jordan valley by any of the steep routes that make for the top one grows familiar with the view, and conscious of the increasing depth below, before the top is reached. Not only so, but from some of the lower but more projecting headlands a view in many respects more impressive than that from the higher crest is to be obtained. This is certainly the case with Rās Šiaghah, which is 350 feet lower and is reached considerably sooner than Nebā itself. Dr. Tristram,¹ Col. Conder, and Dr. G. A. Smith,² all describe the view as it struck them approaching Jebel Nebā from the plateau. In common with Dr. Post, whose admirable description has lain too much concealed in an article³

¹ *Land of Israel* (ed. 2), 540-43; *Land of Moab*, 323 ff.

² *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 562 ff.

³ *Narrative of a Scientific Expedition in the Trans-jordanic region in the spring of 1886 in Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement*, 1888, pp. 175-237.

primarily devoted to botanical observations, I reached Jebel Nebā directly from below, going up "from the steppes of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of the Pisgah that is fronting Jericho" (Deut. xxxiv. 1).

It is unnecessary for me to describe my route at any length. I spent the night of March 14 in the "steppes of Moab," a little south of Tell er-Rāmeḥ, which I shall describe in another article. I rose at dawn the next morning and remarked how finely the hills across Jordan and the Dead Sea, which bounded the view westward, stood out in the early light. Starting from the camp at 6.45 and climbing steeply most of the way, but dipping a little just before reaching 'Ain Jemmaleh, I passed this spring (which was dry) at 9.30. Ten minutes beyond was a tree of no great size, but conspicuous in this treeless land; on that account, perhaps, the spot is sacred to a weli. In another twenty minutes we reached the fine springs known as 'Ayūn Mūsa. These and the streams issuing from them, of which one falls over a short wall of rock and in front of a deep-mouthed cavern clustered about with maiden-hair fern, have been sufficiently described,¹ but the charm of them has certainly not been exaggerated. Blue-clad Bedawy women were filling water-skins, lading therewith diminutive donkeys, and then driving them off to an encampment higher up. I stayed here a couple of hours, chatted with a group of Arab children and heard a solitary cuckoo calling. The view is rather contracted, but what there is is finely framed by the sides of the steep and narrow valley. A stiff but ridable climb of forty minutes from here brought us to the ruin-strewn summit of Rās Ṣiāghah.

After this some time was lost in climbing a very steep hill behind Rās Ṣiāghah, which Aḥmed, my guide, called Nebā. It commanded practically no view. The higher,

summit still further back he said was Rujum (i.e. Cairn) Nebā. Making for this, I had no difficulty, when I reached it, in recognizing that I was on the summit so well described by Conder; but I was keenly disappointed that the view had not more to add to what I had seen below, and, in particular, with the abrupt and continuous termination of it westwards. All this I doubtless might have realized beforehand; as a matter of fact I had not. But of this more hereafter. Leaving the summit I crossed the dip between it and the plateau, which proved a little deeper and rougher than I had anticipated, and reached Mēdebā in $1\frac{1}{4}$ hours. The following day I rode out to El-Maslūbiyeh, the promontory immediately south of Nebā, reaching the summit in $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours. The view hence is in its main features similar to that from Nebā, but it commands much more of the Dead Sea, most of which is shut out by this very range when one is standing on Nebā. There are ruins here also, and among one group of them I noticed a line stretched between props from which were suspended several tresses of hair. The next day on my way north I visited Ḥesbān; Ḥesbān stands much further back than either Nebā or El-Maslūbiyeh, but from the summit of the steep and scarcely rideable north hill, there is a view clear down to the Jordan valley through a considerable dip in the hills immediately to the east.

I had too recently approached Nebā, the most commanding point of view, from below to appreciate to the full the effect of riding off the far-stretching and almost level plateau, and looking down into and across the deep and steeply walled valley of Jordan from such points of view as El-Maslūbiyeh and Ḥesbān; yet even as it was the effect was impressive.

In proceeding now to compare the view from these Moabite heights, and in particular from Jebel Nebā, with the accounts of Moses' view of the Promised Land, it will

be convenient to bring together the various passages in the Old Testament that refer to the matter.

Three passages relate how Yahweh commanded Moses to ascend a mountain and view from thence the land he might not enter. In one of these (derived from the earlier source D) the sole object given for the ascent is the view, and nothing is expressly said as to Moses' death; but in one of the other two passages, both of which are derived from the later source P, it is clearly stated that Moses is to die in the same mountain from which the view is to be seen.

Deuteronomy iii. 23-29 (probably from D^s and written somewhat later than B.C. 621), reads thus :—

And I besought Yahweh at that time, saying, Let me go over, I pray Thee, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly hill country and Lebanon. But Yahweh was enraged with me for your sakes, and hearkened not unto me; and Yahweh said unto me, Let it suffice thee: speak no more unto me of this matter. Go up to the top of the Pisgah and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and see with thine eyes, for thou shalt not cross over this Jordan. But command Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see. And we abode in the valley in the front of Beth-peor.

In P the command is first communicated briefly in Numbers xxvii. 12 f. :—

And Yahweh said unto Moses, Go up into this mountain of the 'Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel: and when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered to thy kinsmen as Aaron thy brother was gathered.

And then more fully in Deuteronomy xxxii. 48 ff. :—

And Yahweh spake unto Moses on this self-same day, saying, Go up unto this mountain of the 'Abārīm, unto Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, which is fronting Jericho, and see the land of Canaan which I am giving to the children of Israel for a possession, and die in the mountain whither thou goest up, and be gathered to thy kinsmen, as Aaron thy brother died in Hor, the mountain, and was gathered to his kinsmen. For thou shalt see the land from a distance, but thither thou shalt not come into the land which I am giving to the children of Israel.

The narrative (Deut. xxxiv. 1-6) relating the actual circumstances of the view is derived in the main from the earliest source J E. Omitting what is derived from P¹ this runs as follows:—

[And Moses went up] to the top of the Pisgah. And Yahweh caused him to see all the land, (*even*) *Gilead as far as Dan, and all Naphtali and all² the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the hinder sea, and the Negeb, and the Round, (even) the plain of Jericho, the city of palm trees as far as Zo'ar.*³ And Yahweh said unto him, This is the land which I swear unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither. So Moses the servant of Yahweh died there in the land of Moab. And he buried him in the ravine in the land of Moab over against Beth-peor: but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.

Now the general impression commonly produced by these various passages, and especially by the last, is that the view from Mount Nebo was very extensive. So far, good; the view from Jebel Nebā and from many other points along the edge of the plateau is in certain directions very extensive. But if this general impression were analysed, it would be found, I believe, to include in the case of most readers the following particulars:—

1. That the view from Mount Nebo embraces substantially more of the land west of Jordan (which Moses but for his sin would have traversed and distributed to the tribes)

¹ The analysis as between J E and P in Deut. xxxiv. 1-6 presents little difficulty. Those who attempt to distinguish between J and E refer the view to the older source J (Bacon, Carpenter and Harford). The opening words in square brackets above are supplied from Deut. iii. 27, which is probably dependent on J E. In the present composite narrative these words have been replaced by a sentence from P which mentions Mount Nebo. See Driver, *Deut.* 420 ff., on whose commentary the above translation also is based.

² The LXX. and the Syriac, no doubt rightly, read thus. In M T (and hence in R.V.), "all" has dropped out, probably by accident.

³ The words in italics may be a subsequent addition to J E; see below.

than can be seen from the "steppes of Moab" where Israel was at the time encamped.

2. That from the summit of Mount Nebo it is possible to look *over* Canaan; in other words, that in ascending from the plains Moses gradually rose high enough to get a clear view over the hills that blocked his view lower down till he finally saw Canaan spread out before him.

3. That, in detail, the view, in addition to embracing Gilead, the Jordan valley and the entire extent of contiguous districts on the west of Jordan from Galilee in the north to the Negeb in the south, extended to and included the two extreme points of Dan in the north and Zo'ar in the south, and in the west the Mediterranean sea.

Now if Mount Nebo was any Moabite summit, 3 (as to some extent has long been recognized) and 2 are false, and 1 true only to a much smaller extent than is, I believe, generally thought to be the case.

Older observers¹ were not certain that the Mediterranean was not visible from Jebel Nebā; but the survey of the country has set this doubt at rest. To see the Mediterranean from Moab is a physical impossibility.² But this fact, when duly understood, carries with it much more that has not yet gained general recognition.

Again, it is admitted that Dan, if identical with Tell el-Ḳaḍi and Zo'ar, if correctly placed at the south end of the Dead Sea, are not in sight from Jebel Nebā. The difficulty of Zo'ar might be overcome by supposing that the Zo'ar here referred to as terminating the view of the plain of Jordan southwards lay to the north of the Dead Sea. It would be more difficult to abandon the usual identification of Dan and to place it in the Merj 'Ayūn, where, though it would still be invisible from Jebel Nebā, it might possibly be visible from some other Moabite height.³ But

¹ Cp. Tristram, *Land of Moab*, 325.

² Conder, *Palestine*, 158.

³ W. F. Birch in *Pal. Expl. Fund. Quarterly Statements*, 1898, pp. 115 ff.

though Dan itself, 100 miles or so to the north, is out of sight, the mention of it does not produce a general impression of the view that is seriously amiss; the view northwards, or rather a little west of north, is certainly very extensive. Tabor, nearly seventy miles distant in a direct line, is in sight, and perhaps on perfectly clear days points further north and very little west of Dan may be visible.

In spite of Deuteronomy iii. 27, it is neither the view southward, which from Jebel Nebā is cut short by the neighbouring ridge of El-Maslūbiyeh, nor the view eastward, which extends but a couple of miles, nor the view northwards, which is considerably more extensive, that Moses is really represented as climbing Mount Nebo to see; it is the view *westward*—of the land which he might not enter, beyond the river which he might not cross. The main question therefore is: what is the character of the view westward from Jebel Nebā? How does it agree with the description in Deuteronomy xxxiv. 1-6? How far does it differ in character from the view to be obtained in the steppes of Moab below?

Now here the most immediately noticeable fact is that whereas Deuteronomy xxxiv. 3 includes the Mediterranean in the view, the Mediterranean, as already stated, cannot be seen from any Moabite summit. Two attempts have been made to get over this difficulty. Conder proposes to render, "Yahweh shewed him all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah, *towards* the hinder sea." This would be a weak and improbable rendering even if it were legitimate, for it makes the last clause pure verbiage, since you must look *towards* the Mediterranean, if you look at the districts mentioned at all. But as a matter of fact the rendering is illegitimate; the preposition \mathcal{V} means distinctly *as far as*. Birch proposes to interpret the "hinder sea" in this one passage not of the Mediterranean, as in Deuteronomy xi. 24, Joel ii. 30, Zechariah xiv. 8, but

of the Dead Sea. He has not, I believe, succeeded in persuading anyone to accept this hazardous interpretation, though Dr. Cheyne (*Encyc. Bibl.* 3367) so far agrees as to think that the original description did not mention the Mediterranean.

These desperate suggestions are mainly of interest as indicating the difficulties that the passage is felt to present. And yet they leave out of account a less obvious, but in many respects a greater, difficulty, which consists in the entire difference in general character of the view as described in Deuteronomy, and the view actually to be seen from Jebel Nebā. The description in Deuteronomy of the view westward is in terms of *districts*; modern descriptions (true to the facts) mainly in terms of *points*. Deuteronomy mentions as in view on the west of Jordan, in addition to the river valley itself, all Naphtali, all the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah and the Negeb. These are districts. Modern descriptions mention a multiplicity of points or ridges such as Tabor, Rās Ibzīk, Ebal, Gerīzim, Neby Samwīl. The reader is only too likely to gain a wrong impression; half consciously he will *add* the points of the modern descriptions to the districts mentioned in the Bible *instead of substituting* the points for the districts, as he should do if his impression is to be correct. In any case the number of points that figure in these modern descriptions may easily give an exaggerated impression of the extensiveness of the view westward because, as a rule, the descriptions fail to indicate the very important and dominating fact that all view in this direction is abruptly cut short at a distance varying from thirty to forty miles, and that nearly half even of this distance is east of Jordan. Northwards (N.N.W.) from Nebo the view extends seventy miles at least (to a point ten miles west of Jordan), westwards (from S.W. to N.W.) forty at most.

If the description in Deuteronomy ran simply, " And Yah-

weh shewed him all the land, and said unto him," the difficulty would be less; it would be easier to treat the single expression "all the land" as vague and general; but when the writer proceeds to explain what he includes in this expression by naming several districts and expressly referring to the totality of three of them (Naphtali, Ephraim and Manasseh, Judah), we can scarcely be expected to infer that from two-thirds to three-quarters of the districts on the west of Jordan, said to be wholly visible, is as a matter of fact invisible.¹ On the contrary if Deuteronomy xxxiv. 1-3 is a description of the view from Jebel Nebā by one who had seen it, and who knew what such expressions as "all the land of Judah" implied, he shows a remarkable lack of precision either in observation or description.

The main fact of the view westward from Jebel Nebā is this: it is a view from the top of one steep mountain wall across a valley nearly 4,000 feet deep to another steep mountain wall of almost exactly the same height.² But for this continuous wall opposite, the eye might readily travel to the Mediterranean, which is but seventy miles away; as it is, the wall, whose top is never more than forty miles distant, and seldom so much, necessarily cuts off the view not only of the sea, but also, as just stated, of about three-fourths of

¹ The reason being that the watershed which obstructs the view is much nearer the Jordan than the Mediterranean. Cp. G. A. Smith, *Hist. Geog.* 47 f. with the physical sketch map facing p. 50. Socin in the art. *Palestine* in *Encyc. Bibl.* says, "About three-fourths of the cis-Jordan country lies to the west of the watershed."

² The height of Jebel Nebā is 2,643 feet above sea level (the Dead Sea being 1,292 below the same); the average height of the Mount of Olives, which is barely 30 miles due east, is 2,600 feet. The highest point of Jerusalem just west of the Mount of Olives is 2,589 feet. At Hebron, 40 miles S. W. of Nebā, the western tableland is over 3,000 feet, it gradually drops northwards, but no ground under 2,000 feet occurs till, nearly 50 miles due north of Hebron, the neighbourhood of Nablus (40 miles N. W. of Nebā) is reached. Nablus, which lies at the top of the pass between Ebal and Gerizim, is 1,870 feet. Conder puts it thus: "The height of Mount Nebo is 2643·8 feet above the Mediterranean. The western watershed is from 3,000-2,500 feet above the same level."

the Land of Promise. Just as the view eastward from the Mount of Olives is stopped short by the straight line of what in the distance appear to be the perpendicular cliffs of Moab, so the view westward from Nebā is cut short by the similar cliffs by which the western tableland sinks to the Jordan valley.

Certainly the western wall does not show in its entire length quite so sustained an elevation as the eastern ; higher points here and there rise upon it or a little behind it, and in the case of Ebal and Gerīzīm (to the N.W.) which rise respectively 1,000 and 1,200 feet above the pass between them, the break in the level is conspicuous. But other points often mentioned in descriptions of the view from Moab are much less significant ; for example, Neby Samwīl (2,935 feet).

Now how does this fact, that the view westward from Jebel Nebā is for fifty miles and more (from S.W. to N.W.) of a mountain wall too high to be seen over, and never broken so as to be seen through, agree with the impression given by Deuteronomy xxxiv. 1-3? To correct that impression, is it enough to say that the Mediterranean is not actually seen from Nebā? Even if the words "as far as the hinder sea" were entirely eliminated, might the reader be safely left to draw the natural conclusion from the remaining statement that from Mount Nebo Moses saw "all Naphtali, and all the land of Ephraim and Manesseh, and all the land of Judah"? Surely not. He must be told, for he would never guess it, that the same wall that hides the sea hides also *nearly three-fourths* of the Promised Land. Not only so ; the quarter that is seen includes, and mainly consists of, all that is most sterile and unattractive in western Palestine : straight opposite and most fully in sight is the Jeshīmōn of Judah, that waste, chaotic wilderness which so well justified its name ; and the long wall for fifty miles or more shows no respectable opening that allows the eye to

pierce through to possible broad and fertile valleys. The wadys leading up from Jericho to the high country behind may be descried, though less clearly than from nearer points in the plain below; still they are but narrow openings up to the unseen land above and beyond—mere cracks in the wall at this distance which the eye may follow up but cannot see through. Even the gap between Ebal and Gerizim cannot be seen through, and it is only to one already familiar with the country that it can speak of Shechem lying in its fertile and beautiful valley below. In the view itself there is no suggestion of fertility even there. The great break in this western wall at the plain of Jezreel is too far north to play much part in the view, though it allows Tabor standing ten miles west of Jordan to be seen.

Again and again as I travelled about Palestine I was struck with the extent to which Dr. G. A. Smith's *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, by its vivid and truthful descriptions, had diminished the necessity for actually visiting the country. But in this matter of the view from the Moabite plateau, he appears to have fallen so much under the fascination of the biblical descriptions that, in the particular which I am chiefly discussing, he does nothing to correct the wrong impression that is likely to be given by them. Let me quote his words, italicizing those that seem to me likely, particularly when taken together, to foster a wrong impression, for apart from these the description is correct and characteristically vivid:—

During their journey over the Table-land [of Moab], Israel had no view westward across the Dead Sea. For westward the plateau rises a little and shuts out all view, but on the other side of the rise it breaks up into promontories . . . which . . . afford a view of *all* Western Palestine (p. 562).

Then, speaking of the Nebā ridge in particular, Dr. Smith continues:—

You have lost the eastern view, but *all* Western Palestine is in sight; only the hither side of the Jordan valley is still invisible, and *north*¹ and south the view is hampered by the near hills. Follow the ridge to its second summit, the Rās Sīāghah, and you find yourself on a headland which, though lower than Rās Nebā, stands free of the rest of the range. The whole of the Jordan valley is now open to you, from Engedi, beyond which the mists become impenetrable, to where, on the north, the hills of Gilead seem to meet those of Ephraim. The Jordan flows below; Jericho is visible beyond. Over Gilead, it is said, Hermon can be seen in clear weather, but the heat hid it from us. The view is almost that described as the last on which the eyes of Moses rested, *the higher hills of Western Palestine shutting out all possibility of a sight of the sea* (p. 563).

Nebo . . . where the host . . . first lost their desert horizon and saw the Promised Land *open* before them (p. 565).

Col. Conder, in one of his descriptions referred to above, says :—

It is on the west² that the scene is most extensive, including all the Judean watershed,³ all Samaria and Lower Galilee, to Tabor and Belvoir. Carmel⁴ is hidden behind Jebel Hazkin, which is close to the Jordan valley and 700 feet higher than Carmel . . . The view thus described appears to be in accordance with the Old Testament account. . . . The only difficulty lies in the mention of Dan and of the western sea, which are not in sight from the ridge.

I have already stated how in actual presence of the scene I felt a much greater sense of the limitation of the view westward than the writers of the foregoing descriptions

¹ This should rather be north-east. Jebel 'Osha, which is almost due north, is in sight at 25 miles distance; i.e. the view north is almost as extensive as due west (about 30 miles). It is between N. and N.N.W. that the view extends furthest.

² The west as contrasted with the east or the south. Cp. the last footnote.

³ Good: if the author had added that this watershed cuts short the view westward at from 30 to 35 miles distance, he would have brought before us the dominating element in the view as successfully as he has actually made known to us the various points that are visible.

⁴ This may be taken in correction of Tristram, who, writing before the Survey, mentions Mount Carmel as in sight from Nebā and indeed from Rās Sīāghah (*Moab*, 325, 330). The fact that it is not, is important: for if Carmel were visible, the view at one point would extend clean across Western Palestine, whereas, as a matter of fact, it never does get half across.

appear to have felt; and I have also stated the main *facts* which must, impressions apart, be taken in modification or explanation of those descriptions. Let me add a part of Dr. Post's description, which I did not read until after my visit to Nebā; his alone of the descriptions known to me brings out the limitation of the view, though even he does not specify how great a proportion of "all the land" is actually invisible:—

When he [Moses] reached the bold headland of Šiāghah, he would linger to take in the wonderful foreground in which the whole host would now be visible filling the plain. The northern third of the Dead Sea, the Jordan valley, to the cleft at the bottom of which he knew lay the sea of Tiberias (albeit invisible from this point of view), and the whole profile of Palestine. Neither from this point, nor from the top of Nebo . . . could he literally see the Mediterranean. *The including of the great sea in the prospect must be taken in the same sense as the seeing of all the land. No mountain in Moab is high enough to enable one to see the Mediterranean over the hills of Palestine, nor to see anything but the eastern declivity of those hills and their profile against the western sky*¹ (p. 184).

From the summit of Nebā the view, as Dr. Post adds, would take in "a more comprehensive *profile*¹ of the promised land across Jordan."

It is interesting to note that a lady, probably S. Silvia of Aquitania, who visited Mount Nebo about the year 385 A.D., in describing the view, speaks more guardedly than some modern writers have done, claiming only to have seen "the most part of Palestine" (*maxima pars Palestinæ*). This is the more noticeable as she was accompanied to the summit, which there is little difficulty in recognizing as Rās Šiāghah, by those who knew the place, "priests and holy monks," and who undertook to point out the places written of in the books of Moses which were visible from the spot. I must content myself with a brief quotation,

¹ The italics are mine. For the appearance of the profile, see the sketch on p. 187 of Dr. Post's article.

which includes, however, all that she says of Western Palestine:—

From the door of the church we saw the place where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea, which place appeared below us as we stood. We saw also opposite not only Livia's [i.e. Tell er-Rameh, whence she had ascended viâ 'Ayûn Mûsâ], which was on the near side of Jordan, but Jericho which was beyond Jordan. . . The most part of Palestine, the land of promise, was seen from thence, also the whole Jordan territory—that is, as far as our eyes could reach.

Then follows a more detailed reference to several places mentioned by name—all east of the Jordan.¹

Dr. Driver has perceived that the limitations of the view are greater than the biblical description or the modern descriptions (primarily Conder's) on which he bases his own, expressly admit, and he has very rightly stated in his Commentary on Deuteronomy (p. 420) that if applied to the view from Jebel Nebâ, "the terms of Deut. xxxiv. 1-3 are hyperbolic, and must be taken as including points filled in by the imagination, as well as those actually visible to the eye." But the case is even stronger than this. The imagination has a great deal more to do than to supply invisible *points*; scarcely more than a fourth of the districts specified on the west of Jordan is visible to the eye; the remaining three-fourths must be filled in by the imagination. As soon as this is sufficiently realized, as soon as it is understood that it is no mere question of the Mediterranean, perhaps also of Dan and Zo'ar being just out of sight, it must be obvious that there is a difficulty, and it is natural to seek a way out.

Dr. Post, who feels the limitation of the view from Jebel Nebâ, is more than half inclined to identify Nebo with the far loftier Jebel 'Osha in Gilead, which is about twenty-five miles north of Nebâ. Jebel 'Osha (3,592 feet above sea level) is not only nearly 1,000 feet higher than Nebâ, but it

¹ *S. Silvia of Aquitania*, ed. J. H. Bernard in *Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society* (vol. i.).

lies opposite a lower stage of the western ridge. The view, or strictly the combination of views, from the three peaks of which this mountain consists, must therefore be considerably less restricted than is that from Nebā, including Šiāghah, and must approach more nearly to what the biblical descriptions of the view from Mount Nebo lead us to expect. The view is thus described by Dr. Post¹:—

From the southernmost of the western peaks . . . is seen the finest panorama of the opposite table-land of Palestine obtainable, far finer than that from any part of Jebel Nebā, including Siaghah. It takes in the heights above Hebron, the hill country of Judea, Benjamin, Ephraim, Galilee, and Hermon. From the north-eastern peak . . . may be seen the whole circle of the Promised Land, including the trans-Jordanic region. I noted the Hauran range, Jebel 'Ajlūn, Hermon, the mountains of Galilee, Samaria (the cleft of Nablus is exactly opposite), Carmel, the hill country of Judea, Moab to Jebel Shihān, and the rolling country which forms the watershed between, Moab and Gilead on the west, and the Syrian desert on the east. From this peak the Ghor and the eastern declivity of the Palestine table-land is hidden by the two western peaks. Were I seeking for a "Nebo," or "the top of a hill" over against Jericho, from the summit of which the most comprehensive as well as the most detailed view of the whole Promised Land might be obtained, I would choose Jebel Husha'. I am doubtful whether the name Nebā may not be an accommodation of the Arabs to the wishes of travellers.² Certainly nothing but the name entitles it to the preference over Jebel Husha' as the site of Moses' last view.

Three points in particular may be singled out in virtue of which the general impression produced by the view from Jebel 'Osha must come strikingly nearer that which the description of Deuteronomy xxxiv. 1-3 leads us to expect than does the view from Nebā. (1) Directly opposite, 1,800 feet below

¹ Cp. earlier, Seetzen, *Reisen*, ii. 318 f.; Merrill, *East of the Jordan*, 279.

² Such accommodation as Dr. Post suspects in the present instance is well known. But see Robinson, *Bibl. Researches*, ii. 307; Merrill, *East of the Jordan*, 245. It must also be remembered that Jerome's statements as to the site of Mount Nebo, and the town of the same name, point to Jebel Nebā, and apparently imply that the mountain and town were in his days still known by this name. *Onom.* (ed. Lagarde), 141. 30 ff., 142. 13 f., cp. 89. 8 ff. The same inference may be drawn from the description of S. Silvia of Aquitania, partly cited above.

and at twenty-five miles distance, is the pass of Shechem. This must give the impression of looking, at least, *into* the western land—an important point, as I can testify from my own experience. Unfortunately I did not myself visit Jebel 'Osha, but in travelling from Jerash to Beisan I rode for some distance along the edge of the plateau north of Jebel 'Osha. Here I looked over the plain of Beisan, the ancient plain of Jezreel, stretching away westwards into the country. The western view was no longer as in Moab, a wall without an opening, and I no longer felt, as I had felt there, walled out from, but rather invited across into, the western land. (2) The view includes Carmel, and therefore at one point at least extends right across the promised land. (3) The view must give some impression even of looking *over* this country; for, so the description implies, much is to be seen even on the peak, whence the eastern declivity, which alone is visible from Nebo, is hid.

As to the three specific farthest points of the view—Dan, Zo'ar, and the Mediterranean—'Osha seems as little to satisfy the description of Deuteronomy xxxiv. 1-3 as Nebo: Dr. Post at least mentions none of them as being visible. For my own part I am inclined to lay much less weight on these particular points than on the general character of the view. But there is one serious objection to identifying Mount Nebo with Jebel 'Osha which Dr. Post has overlooked. Mount Nebo, or the mountain on which Moses died, not only in the later priestly narrative, but in JE, which embodies the earliest tradition, is expressly said to be in Moab: Jebel 'Osha is not in Moab. There is at least no evidence that Moabite territory on the plateau, even in the days of its further extension northwards, ever stretched any distance north of the Wady Hesban, which flows some five miles north of Nebā and twenty south of Jebel 'Osha; and the most northerly point on the "steppes of Moab" below is still some ten or fifteen miles south of Jebel 'Osha.

So far then we have before us as alternatives to identify Nebo with Jebel Nebā, and to admit that the view is very inaccurately described; or with Jebel 'Osha, which is not in Moab, but commands a view, not indeed satisfying all the conditions, but giving a general impression less unlike that which the terms of Deuteronomy xxxiv. 1-3 suggest. Perhaps neither of these alternatives is impossible, for unless we hold that Moses wrote the account of his own death, we are not bound to assume that the view is described by one who had actually seen it.

But a more probable way out of the main part of the difficulty lies along the line of textual and literary criticism. Is the description of "all the land" in terms of specific places and districts in Deuteronomy xxxiv. 2f. from the same hand as the statement that Yahweh showed Moses "all the land"? or did the original story content itself with this indefinite statement (cp. Deut. iii. 23-29, Num. xxvii. 12, Deut. xxxii. 49)? and is the detailed description the note of a later editor or scribe¹ who wished to comment on the phrase "all the land" rather than to indicate the details of the view? Textual criticism shows us at least that this might be the point of interest to a scribe; for the Samaritan text, which *omits* the words that have occasioned all the trouble and sent people to Nebo in search of a view of the Mediterranean and much else that cannot be seen thence, contains instead a shorter statement that is evidently intended to describe, not a view, but what "all the land" ideally included. The Samaritan text runs: "And Yahweh caused him to see all the land *from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates, and unto the hinder sea.*" The words which I have italicized refer to the ideal boundaries of Israel's country, and they are obviously a gloss or editorial note based on Deuteronomy xi. 24.

¹ So Di. on the ground of peculiarities of expression; and Bacon (*Triple Tradition*) on the ground of its omission from the Samaritan text.

If we accept the interpretation (defensible only if the words in question be a gloss), that the geographical details define the extent of the land and not of the view, we are quit of the main difficulty. What remains may appear inconsiderable; yet perhaps it is real, and, if so, it is significant; in any case, to consider it may recall one or two facts apt to be forgotten. I will put the case in the form of a question: Is the difference in the character of the views from the steppes of Moab and from Jebel Nebā sufficiently great to account for Moses being taken up to the mountain top *in order to see the view of Western Palestine*? or, to put it otherwise, is the character of the country such as to give rise to a tradition that Moses ascended from the plains of Moab to Nebo in order to see the land he might not enter? The salient fact is this: in the steppes of Moab you look across Jordan to the mountain wall beyond; in ascending Nebā you rise between 3,000 and 4,000 feet and you retreat some miles from this wall; from the summit you see further along this wall, you see a peak or two behind it; but you just as little see over it as you did below. Your westward view remains just as abruptly cut short, a little further off it is true, but only by so much as you have retreated eastward. Canaan is for the most part invisible, alike in the plains below and from the summit above. You do not look *over* it, you do not even look *into* it, you merely look *at* it—at the eastern declivity of the high and broken tableland of which Canaan consists.

Again, the view from Nebā comprises in large part country that, as the story goes, had already been traversed by Moses, and, for the rest, country that his eye must often have rested on as he traversed the land of the Amorites northward to the Jabbok. In considering Moses' last view the fact is probably often overlooked (for the passages do not suggest it) that he had previously seen all, and more than all, that he could see from Mount Nebo, that, as Dr.

Post well puts it, "in going up Nebo from the valley of the Jordan, Moses was to take a *last*, not a *first*, look, and that over scenes now become familiar to him and his people." Yet such is the case if Jebel Nebā is Nebo, and Moses had previously traversed the country between Arnon and Jabboḳ (Num. xxi. 21-31).

Now do the narratives naturally convey the impression that Moses was to see from Nebo no further into the land which he might not enter than he could see below, and that he was to look on nothing at all that he and all his followers had not often seen before? I cannot think so. The difficulty might be overcome if we could take the phrase "Yahweh *caused him to see* all the land" to be used, much as in Amos vii. 1, 4, 7, viii. 1, of what was seen in vision.¹ In that case it would be as little meant that Moses, though he ascended a lofty mountain, actually saw from thence all Canaan as it can be meant that Jesus from the "exceeding high mountain" saw "all the kingdoms of the world" in a moment of time (Matt. iv. 8, Luke iv. 5). No mountain in existence commands a view of all the kingdoms of the world; no mountain in Moab of all Canaan. But this interpretation breaks down in the presence of v. 4: "I have caused thee to see it *with thine eyes*"; the writer who uses these words has in mind a view that was actually seen with ordinary human sight.

If, then, we should seem driven to locate the origin of the story away from Moab, we should most naturally look for its birthplace, as perhaps Steuernagel¹ tentatively, and certainly Cheyne,² have done, in the neighbourhood of

¹ This is assumed as self-evident by M. Clermont-Ganneau, who writes (*P. E. F.* 1901, p. 245): "It must not be forgotten that the vision of Moses is a veritable vision in the ideal sense of the word—a supernatural vision, not subject to the conditions of time and space. It is certain that it is humanly impossible to the ordinary eyes to perceive from the height of Nebo all the extent of country that Moses is reputed to have viewed."

¹ *Die Einwanderung der israelitischen Stämmen*, p. 72.

² Articles "Nebo," "Moses" (§ 16) in *Encyc. Biblica*.

Kadesh. Did the mountain north of Kadesh, mentioned in a confused story (Num. xiv. 43), command a view of that limited land of promise which the spies had traversed, and which extended only so far as Hebron? and was it this view that called forth the cry, "We will go up unto the place which Yahweh hath promised"? and was it from this same summit, or a more commanding height in the same region, that Moses, according to the earliest form of the tradition, saw the land which he was not to enter?

With questions such as these we enter on a field of pure speculation which cannot be further investigated at the close of this article. Nor do I wish to close in speculation. Let me rather summarize the facts which I have shown must receive attention and some explanation in connexion with the narratives of Moses' last view:—

1. Not only the Mediterranean but nearly three-quarters of the country west of Jordan are invisible from *Jebel Nebā*, or from any point along the edge of the Moabite plateau.

2. The view from any such point includes only what must have become perfectly familiar to Moses and the people, as they traversed the land between Arnon and *Jabbok*.

3. The view westwards, though more extensive, is substantially of the same character as the view from the steppes of Moab; both are abruptly terminated by the same mountain wall,

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