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THE VALLEY OF ACHOR.

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“I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope.”—
HOSEA ii. 15.

TO appreciate this prophetic language we must, of course, know something of the valley of Achor. While it is a name not much used now, it marked a spot once well known to the Israelite in the geography of his land. Its precise location cannot now be traced. It was near Jericho; it was closely connected with Gilgal; it was in the deep gorge of the Jordan, nestling somewhere amidst the spurs of the mountains that formed the central feature of the promised land. The name occurs only three times in the Bible. It has the eminence of importance, if not of frequent mention. A glance at its brief record may make it to us a door of hope, as God, through Hosea, said he would make it to Israel in the olden day.

I. THE VALLEY OF ENTRANCE.

Israel's first camp across the Jordan was in the valley of Achor. It marked a great transition of the people. For forty years they had been pilgrims on the march or in the camp. They had camped on other people's ground, and marched across alien lands. They had never been at home. Their whole history is summed up in two short chapters—slaves in Egypt, pilgrims in the wilderness. But in the valley of Achor they had a new



experience—at home. Always it had been : to the land of which the Lord had said, “I will give it you.” Now, this is the land. Here pilgrimage ceased, and permanent residence began ; here was the throwing off of the old and the putting on of the new.

Some sudden changes took place in Achor’s vale. Here was a camp in which Moses was sadly missed. The great leader had finished his work and gone to his reward. Joshua had now begun to be magnified in the sight of Israel. In the valley of Achor a new order of things began.

See! yonder cloudy pillar, guide of the host for forty years, rolls up and is borne away by unseen hands. The pillar, which was a cloud by day and a fire by night, is beheld no more. Its work accomplished, it retires from the scene. Israel has reached the land long sought, and there is no more need of guidance on the way. Another change. The morning comes. As the Israelite looks out from his tent door he sees no manna on the ground. The manna ceased, the bread from heaven by which a travelling host had been so long fed. A better food was now in reach, the old corn of the land and Canaan’s luscious fruits. On these, with great delight, they fed. How great a change a day had made!

That change had been accomplished by the shortest march Israel had ever made. Many a long day’s march Israel had made. Beginning in the morning fresh, in the evening worn and weary they had pitched their tents, yet seemed to accomplish naught. No progress, no gain, no betterment of their estate ; or, if a change, only seeming worse for their long march. This last march, which brought them to Achor’s vale, the shortest, yet accomplished most. At night they camp in sight of yonder eastern bank of Jordan, which in the morning

they had left; in sight of yonder heights of Moab, where the tented host so recently had dwelt. Now let the silver trumpet sound long and clear. Let its music ring. Its prolonged note has reached the plain where the morning camp had been, and wakes the silence of its solitude. Israel's shortest march of all in those forty years! How great a change is by it wrought! Take down the old signs; put up the new; Israel at home.

Why all this? Why can a little movement here and now do more than great movements elsewhere and at other times? That short journey led Israel across a great dividing line. That made the difference. Some places that are very far apart are very near—no line between them; no real difference, though there be a stretch of miles on miles. Some places are very near, yet very far apart. A line divides them. It makes a very great difference on which side of the line we stand. By long journeys we may only compass the mountain, or measure vast stretches of dreary desert sands or pathless wilds, and' after all be no better off, and at last die wretched pilgrims. All the trouble goes for naught. A step across the line may put us at home, may bring us into the valley of Achor. To us it becomes a door of hope, a gateway to the land.

Come over into the valley of entrance to-day. Some of you have journeyed long, but have not reached the Rest. You are clinging to the accompaniments of pilgrimage—cloud and manna, things that have brought you to the border of the real blessing. You look over into the valley of entrance, but cross not its dividing line. Make this shortest march of all. In sight of the promised blessing, cross over and possess it. This final act marks no great progress, but notes a mighty change. God has put the door of hope across the line. He who

obeys God's call may enter, and entering cherish hope. He may not know a great deal of the land. He may not have seen what lies beyond the valley of entrance. His progress may be measured by very short lines. He may be just across the line, just within the boundary. God bids him hope.

God puts the door of hope just across the line; not up in the strongholds; not up in the high mountains, approached by narrow, steep and difficult defiles, to be besieged and stormed and scaled by heroic act; but in the beautiful, lowly vale, into which the pilgrim cannot help coming who will only cross the line. Hope is not a matter of rich experience and great advance, but of clear title and prompt obedience to God's call. It is not a matter of profound feeling, but of camping on the other side of the line God has drawn.

On Moab's heights; in Israel's camp. Come to the brow of this mountain. Look over. See threadlike Jordan in its deep gorge. Beyond it the beautiful valley running up into the sides of the mountains, robed in loveliness, arrayed in exquisite charms. It is a happy place to be. But more: it is the gateway to the entire land. When God calls, obey. Camp in the valley of Achor. You will find, wreathed in its graceful vines, amidst its beautiful flowers and mellow fruits, a door of hope, a gateway to the land. So God has put for us a beautiful door of hope within reach, but across the line. If you will cross this line, come. Come now to Jesus Christ. This first stand will be to you a door of hope. Through it and from it you may advance to all the treasures and delights of grace and glory, too.

II. THE VALLEY OF TROUBLE.

It is a significant fact that Israel's first camp in Canaan,

so beautiful and bright and full of hope, should be the place from which their army went forth to calamitous defeat, and to which the routed force rushed back in disorder and dismay. Strangely significant! Achor was a gateway to the entire land. Israel entertained no wish to lie always at the gate, but, having been happily ushered in, began to plan for pushing further on.

A city on the overhanging heights they conclude to take. They send a party up the mountain pass to reconnoitre and report. Their report: a few can take it. A little army climbs up, is completely routed, and hastily returns. Alarm seizes on the entire host. The secret of defeat God reveals. There is an accursed thing within the camp. Call the roll. Achan is singled out. Out of two million people God can discern the troubler, and single out the man. None can hide from him. A multitude is no defence from him with whom we have to do. God has no difficulties. He knows where sin lurks, and he can bring it forth into the light of day.

Achan stands helpless and exposed. What has he done? Is he a murderer? No. A blasphemer? No. Unclean? No. He is a young man; for Joshua says: "My son, what hast thou done?" He confesses all. In his tent is concealed a Babylonish garment and a wedge of gold, spoils of war. That does not seem so bad in itself. But it is fearful in this light: God forbade it. There can be no greater sin than to disobey God. "Achan, did you know it was wrong?" "Yes; I hid it." He weeps. But tears wash not away his sin. Make way. Stand around. Take now the stones, and hurl them at him, who brought the accursed thing into Israel's camp. Then, when he lay dead, they heaped the stones on him to mark the spot where Israel's troubler died. Whatever the beautiful valley before was named, henceforth they called it

Achor, Valley of Trouble. Then the army marched on to victory. So even by its gloomy name the valley of Achor was to Israel a door of hope. The trouble which they encountered there was after all a pledge of victory.

Certain hard lessons which we learn open to us the door of hope, and make way for further progress, and qualify us to advance. Religious life is not meant to cherish sin, nor to afford to sin a hiding-place, where unnoticed it may ply its deadly work. In the Christian God does not license sin. God is as sure to punish sin in his people as in any one else. God slew all the rebellious in the wilderness. They were not allowed to enter Canaan. On Moab's plains all who were led away into idolatry God slew. They were not allowed to cross the Jordan. But now the host has crossed the border stream, and is camped in the valley just beyond, none aged, none infirm. Will not God be indulgent to them now? See here a venture. Achan disobeys a known command. Will not God pass that by? Vain hope. Achan dies by God's command.

Sin is just as bad in a Christian as anywhere else. God will drive it out; by rough means it may be, by some means it will be, though by tears and sighs and groans. Your sin must leave. The process may be painful; but sin must leave. These hard places become monumental places in our lives, where by severe correction there is opened to us a door of hope. There is hope for one who has learned this lesson: no sin; no accursed thing.

The fruit of disobedience is defeat. All check to progress is in sin. There were two attacks on Ai. How different their results! The same men, the same place, the same courage, the same zeal, the same expectation. One a disaster; the other a glorious success. Yonder

mound explains the difference. Sin was rooted out. The greatest obstacle in the way of the success of truth and of gospel triumph is not the number and prowess of the opposing host; not the strength of his towers and battlements and the bristling ramparts of his defence; but it is the disobedience that finds a lodgment in Jehovah's host. Defeat came to Israel, not when foes were mightiest, but when Israel in this was weakest, when Israel disobeyed the Lord.

An unwritten chapter in the history of the church: the causes of defeat. Not the might of foes, nor the number of them, nor their munitions of war; no more than it was Ai that by its might hurled back Israel's startled men. The cause is in the camp. The want is at home. It is in these tents where tabernacle the warriors of God. Search here. Find it; drive it out. Then there can be no successful resistance to the gospel work. When we find and kill the sin that causes harm, we, too, shall call the Valley of Trouble a door of hope.

All Israel did not sin in this; but all had trouble from it. The trouble, too, was to the entire host a blessing, because it became to all a door of hope. It is the hard lesson from which we get most good, and from which opens widest the door of hope. Israel little thought, as they camped in that beautiful valley, where all was so sweet and bright and lovely, where they had turned their backs on the dreadful desert and the howling wilderness, where there were no mournful desert winds, no rude storms, but musical brooks and gentle fountains and soft breezes, that they were going to have a terrible sorrow there. Yet it came, and through no fault of the entire host. They had to bear the burden, though they did not make it. But after it was all over

they had learned a great lesson and received a great blessing.

Our rest in the valley of delight is often interrupted and disturbed. It may not be our fault. It may come like a mountain storm, quick, sharp, severe. The experience may give a new name to our abode, a name of sorrow. What shall we call our once happy vale, where our joys were many, and our hopes were bright, and our pleasures were as the sweet morning hours, where we were all together, and our songs were happy? What shall we call it now? Call it the valley of Achor. We know now what trouble is, and sorrow and tears. We dwell in the shadow now · valley of Achor.

Hark! From above a voice that speaks in accents of cheer, in contrast with our sad hearts and plaintive mood. Hear! The valley of Achor I will make to you a door of hope. A heavenly presence is felt. In the deep shadows the tumultuous soul is stilled. The cheering music of the heavenly voice gladdens the heart. The music of the heart is transposed from chord to chord, till all its plaintive notes are lost and only cheerful strains remain. The brightening light, breaking through the darkness, chases the shadows all away. It is the same scene, but the scene retouched and transformed. The valley of Achor still, but it has become a door of hope. Then we thank God, who brought us through the trouble into peace. Then, in the new light, we wonder that the valley ever seemed so dark.

III. THE VALLEY OF RENEWAL.

Many a long and weary year rolled by in Israel's checkered history in which Achor is not named. It seemed destined to oblivion. Many passing doubtless said, There Achan died. Judges ruled and kings

reigned. Israel grew and prospered, then declined. The kingdom was rent in twain. Calamities befell. Disasters happened. Worse destinies seemed imminent. Apostate, wicked, abandoned, Israel became. Idolatries and crimes of all sorts prevailed. Oh, what a change! How sad and desperate! God calls Hosea, and says to him, Go, call Israel back. Invite them, allure them. Bid them recall the olden time of their zeal and piety. If anything will soften the human heart, it is calling up the happy past. Call to their mind the record of the good time when their fathers crossed the Jordan and camped in the valley of Achor, where they entered the land, and where they were delivered out of trouble. I will make it the door of hope to them again, and they shall sing just as they sang there long ago. So this long interval of sin and sorrow shall be cut out, and happiness and consecration be renewed.

We are all more or less familiar with the irreparable; the wrongs in life that we cannot right; the evils we have done that we now cannot undo; the sins that stay. A word you said, you would now like to recall, but cannot. An act your right hand did, you would give your right hand now to undo. You have lost your morning hours of life. Oh, if you could bring them back and use them better! You are suffering from early wrongs. A thousand sins perpetually haunt you, and mock your folly, by which so easily you were led astray. You have drifted into ways from which you cannot now escape. You have contracted obligations you know not how to annul, nor yet how to meet. What a helpless feeling creeps over you, possesses you. Bound, *bound*, BOUND! Oh! to break the chain and be free again. You are a wreck, a heap of ruins. You can never get back to where you were. Poor remnant of a broken

life! What can you do with it? An old man is seen looking at the children as they play. What is he thinking about? How great advantage he has over them in being farther on with life's work, nearer the goal, nearer the great reward? Oh, no; far from it. He is thinking of his own misspent life; wishing he might once more stand at life's door of hope; thinking he would enter in, go on, and do well. But he is a ruin now, and has lost his time. It is sad! The picture stands for many.

Hosea, run to that man, and tell him the Lord can make the valley of his sorrow hopeful yet. Tell him God invites. Tell him the valley of Achor God can make a door of hope, though to his dim vision there is no such bright prospect yet revealed. In that valley songs of gladness, as in the olden days, may wake the silence, or change the sad refrain of hopeless grief to a note of sweet delight and purest joy.

Is there a troubled soul now here? Is there here a wrecked life? Come to the door of hope. Bring your ruins. Bring the fragments of your life, no matter how small. Bring the relics of your love, no matter how impaired. Bring your dishonored bodies, no matter how abused. Bring your polluted hearts, no matter how soiled. God wishes you. God has provided for you. God calls you. He wishes you to cast yourself down at his feet as a poor wreck, to be renewed, restored by him. Oh! what can there be made of this sinful life? Much, very much. God says he will blot out the wretchedness you have wrought. He will take you back, back to the first camping-place, a reminiscence still to you of earliest peace and sweetest joy. Come to the valley of Achor. He will make it to you a door of hope. You shall sing happy songs again, as happy as ever waked from its silence the lovely vale.