

new pharaoh and his tyrannical people to learn lessons they would never forget.

The process began as far as Moses was concerned when he was leading the flock of "Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian" on the far side of the desert as he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And here comes the problem as to exactly who this Jethro was. The commonly accepted interpretation among the translators of the Old Testament is that 'Jethro' was another name for Reuel, on account of the phrase that he was Moses' "father-in-law". But, as *Speaker's Commentary* and others have pointed out, the term "father-in-law" is not an exact designation in the original Hebrew; rather is it a looser term signifying any relative by marriage. And this opens up the possibility that Jethro was not the same person as Reuel, but was in fact Reuel's eldest son, who had inherited his father's flocks, his title and his office. The period of forty years was a long time, during which Reuel, already father of seven daughters (and who knows how many sons) when Moses arrived, could, like the Pharaoh who had menaced Moses, have passed from the scene, leaving Jethro, as Moses' brother-in-law, in charge of family affairs. Such an interpretation provides satisfactory explanations for the change of name, and still allows for the respected relationship that Moses had with Jethro later on in the Exodus story.

Howbeit, Jethro's was the flock; and Moses was its shepherd in the region of "the mountain of God", where so much of significance for the children of Israel was later to be enacted, when his sharp eyes saw a bush on fire in the middle distance, and he gazed at it for a while. That a thorny acacia should catch fire in the heat of the sun in a dried-up wadi could not have been all that unusual, and the flames would quickly consume it. But this one differed. It went on burning and burning, and was not consumed. His curiosity aroused by the phenomenon, Moses decided to go and have a closer look at "this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up". Then, "When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And Moses said, 'Here I am'. 'Do not come any closer', God said. 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground'. Then He said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'. At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God".

What followed was not just the commissioning of Moses to become the leader of the children of Israel in the most significant migration of any nation in the history of mankind, but also the revelation of God's eternal Self towards the salvation of all men.

(To be continued)

Your Letters



A sign we may have overlooked

Over the course of the years we have all become quite well informed about the 'signs of the times' contained in the Word. The thoughts which follow raise the question, Have we overlooked a very significant one?

The sign we refer to is to be found in several chapters in Isaiah. It concerns a time in Israel's history when the nation, which should have been putting its trust in God, chose rather to put its trust in its neighbour the Assyrian. Both King Ahaz and later King Hezekiah's governors, if not the king himself, were guilty of this, only to discover that they had chosen treacherous friends. The events of those times, we suggest, provide the pattern for a further and final fulfilment of the

prophecy involving the fulfilment of the names of the prophet's two sons, those men of sign, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, meaning 'Speed the spoil, haste the prey' (8:1-4) and Shear-jashub, meaning 'The remnant shall return' (7:3).

It is from considering the record of these events as a pattern of things to come that we propose that a major sign today will be that Israel will, as in Isaiah's time, again put its trust in the Assyrian instead of God. The Assyrian in its latter-day manifestation will, it appears, again be the 'speedy spoiler'. Micah 5:5 reads, "this man [Christ in context] shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land", and it will be by Christ's intervention that the prisoners taken captive by the enemy will be able to return to their land, thus fulfilling the Shear-jashub prophecy. This

conflict, we believe, is pre-Gogian and relates to that of the latter-day occupants of the territory of ancient Assyria, Iran and Iraq.

Although Isaiah 10 needs to be read in full, we focus on verse 20: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant [Shear-jashub] of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon [lean upon, put their trust in] him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth". Other versions also leave no uncertainty regarding Israel's great error in seeking peace through confederacy. To give one example, the Septuagint reads, "And it shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel shall no more join themselves with, and the saved of Jacob shall no more trust in, them that injured them; but they shall trust in the Holy God of Israel, in truth".

A move against Israel by this latter-day Assyrian would quickly trigger the rest of the Middle East nations to join battle against their common

foe. Zechariah 13:8, "two parts therein shall be cut off and die", is truly dreadful to contemplate.

Isaiah 33:1 enlightens us further about the spoiler: "Woe to thee that spoilest [Maher-shalal-hash-baz], and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee". With the intervention of the Lord described in the verses which follow, Israel has no problem in spoiling the spoiler. Regarding this treachery, see also Isaiah 24:16, another passage which confirms the above reasoning and our need now to watch for an Israel that, instead of turning to God for help in time of trouble, will foolishly put their trust in those who will prove to be treacherous 'friends'.

We certainly live in momentous days.

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New series

The woman by the well

An exposition of John 4:1-42 (1)

John M. Forbes

John's account of the meeting of Jesus with a woman of Samaria and the bringing of the gospel to her is well known. But is there a deeper meaning to this incident? In this three-part article the incident is linked with both the past and future of Israel, demonstrating the consistency of God's dealings with man and man's tendency to resist God's offer of salvation.

A. The problem and the background

THE LORD JESUS came preaching and teaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God. But he was sent only "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" and he had forbidden his disciples to preach in the cities of Samaria (Mt. 10:5,6; 15:24). "The Jews [had] no dealings with the Samaritans" (Jno. 4:9), whom they regarded

as apostate, to the extent that devout Jews traveling from Judea to Galilee preferred a route that bypassed Samaria.

Why was it, then, that Jesus "must needs go through Samaria" (v. 4) if an alternative route was available? Why did he preach the gospel to the Samaritans? And why did he bring into that preaching the marital circumstances of a woman whom he met by a well? And why, given the reference to baptism in verse 1, is there no mention of the woman, or of the others who believed Jesus, being baptized at that time?

It is in seeking the answers to these questions that we are reminded of the consistency of God's ways in dealing with man, and the determination of man to resist the process of salvation.

The background

At Jesus' first advent, Judah was in the land of promise, and Ephraim, the northern ten tribes,