

# Hebron

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Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.—*Num 13: 22.*

In this chapter we have the account of Moses sending from the wilderness 12 spies, to search out the character of the land of promise and the kind of people who dwelt in it. Israel was now close upon its border, and, apparently, the time to occupy it was near. What was it like? What facilities for, or hindrances to, their taking possession would they find in the land itself?

The spies make a 40 days' search (40 is the number of perfected probation; thus our Lord was tempted 40 days and nights); but the only place they visited within its borders, from Zin to Rehob, that is mentioned by name, is Hebron, with its valley, thereafter called Eshcol. The brief account of their journey is broken by the little parenthesis that heads this paper—an interruption in the narrative which has doubtless a valuable lesson for us in the mind of the Spirit. What is it?

The facts are many which gather round the terms of this short sentence: let us collect these from the other portions of Scripture which record them, and then we shall be able to learn the lesson.

“Hebron.”—Hebron is first introduced to us in Gen 13: 18 as one of Abram's dwelling-places, where he built an altar unto Jehovah. Thus it is distinguished by godly worship. In Gen 18 (“Mamre in Hebron”—13: 18), it is distinguished by marvellous communion between God and Abraham, followed by a scene of intercessory prayer, which God fully owns. In our chapter (Num 13), Hebron is the place where the spies find and take specimen-fruits of Canaan's produce—grapes, figs, and-pomegranates—the first being shown by one cluster of such growth, that it was borne between two on a staff. No other such cluster is anywhere recorded; it is the richest production of the vine known.

“Was built.”—Then it was not a hill and valley only, but also an established town or city. A district—the plains of Mamre—were included in it, and a residential property that had been duly constructed and ordered by the hand of man.

“Seven years.”—This is an absolute statement of a fact not elsewhere recorded. A year is the complete period during which the successive seasons (Gen 8: 22) are all carried on. Seven of these periods elapsed between the building of Hebron and Zoan respectively, and seven is the number of perfection.

“Before.”—This is an important word,—that the city Hebron was constructed antecedently to that of Zoan. Why, we shall see.

“Zoan.”—This was- also a district, and a town in it. It was where the counsellors of Pharaoh were gathered, and where, too, they became “fools,” and their counsel “brutish” (Isa 19: 11-13; 30: 4). It was where, further, God wrought His “marvels” and His “wonders” (Psalm 78: 12, 43).

“In Egypt.”—Hebron was in Canaan; Zoan, in the land of Pharaoh. Other accessory items we need not now take up; but, collecting these together, we have this fact, that Hebron, the place of the richest fruits of Canaan, was established the perfection of time prior to the building of

the town where Pharaoh gathered his princes and counsellors, where God shewed His signs, and where those counsellors became fools.

Why has the Holy Ghost recorded this priority of the building of Hebron? It is in illustration of the grace in God's counsels respecting us from eternity, "written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." Our God has omitted nothing by which He could assure our hearts.

Examine separately the moral value of the facts we have collected. The contrast between Egypt and Canaan is well known; Egypt under Pharaoh being, within certain limits, a figure of the world in its subjection to Satan, its god; Canaan, a figure of heavenly places known to faith. Princes and counsellors are found gathered at Zoan; the wise men of the world come together both for consultation and for display. There Jehovah showed His wonders, if possibly these intelligent leaders might own Him. But, no. Rejecting God's evidences, they stultified themselves. How often has man, in the course of history, repeated this. Yet men still rely on man; it is a common proverb, *Vox populi, vox Dei*—i.e., the voice of the mass is the voice of God. What a delusion! Led by chief priests and elders, the mass cried, "Crucify Him." It was in that way that "the princes of this world crucified the Lord of glory." What a wisdom was theirs that they did not know what they were doing! Had they known it, we are told, they would not have done it. Surely, "the foolishness of God is wiser than men."

On the other hand, Hebron tells us of a place of blessing in Canaan, the richest blessing that fruits may represent, in resurrection. For Canaan is to Egypt, not only across the Red Sea, but also beyond Jordan. It is the expression of a sphere which, while separated from "this present evil world," has also its own characteristic joys and privileges, after death (passage of Red Sea) and resurrection (passage of Jordan) are made known. And the highest blessings are in the type found at Hebron. Who shall say what grapes, figs, and pomegranates each foreshew? Whatever they may be, Hebron is the place for them.

Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt. The ordering and establishment of the sphere of our richest blessings in Christ was all accomplished, the perfection of time prior to the existence and building of the sphere where man's collective wisdom gathered together.

Give this its simple value. In His blessed counsels, God set up in Christ "a range of spiritual blessings long before man even existed, still less had he gathered at Zoan. "Or ever the earth was," these counsels had been settled in heaven. Travel back to Gen 1, and "the beginning," as to the shore of time, and what lies out beyond in eternity as a boundless sea? A few Scriptures reveal all we know, and these are the statements of the counsels referred to—purposes of God in Christ, who ultimately shall be the manifested Head of the creation of God, the last Adam. Adam in Eden was only a provisional thing in the vast ways of God. Too quickly, despite flood and Babel warnings, man built his Zoan, and scoffed at and mocked the signs of God. But could anything at man's hand, suicidal though his wisdom was, frustrate the purposes of the eternal Blessor? Impossible. Satan might tempt and captivate, but Satan and flesh are utterly outwitted and defeated when the only Wise brings forth what His heart has reserved in store.

Pass beyond "in the beginning;" find, if not the landmarks exactly, yet the sea-marks in that

vast expanse, a verse here, and a verse there, written to tell us God's heart, and consider what may be a few grapes of the superb cluster grown of God before the foundation of the world. Collect all that is revealed of the past of eternity.

- God was.—"From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God" (Ps 90: 2; 93: 2).
- Christ was.—"Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5: 2).
- Love between God and Christ was.—"Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17: 24)
- Glory around God and Christ was.—"The glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17: 5).
- The love in the glory begat mercy.—"The mercy of Jehovah is from everlasting to everlasting" (Ps 103: 17).

(In Proverbs 8 are other details, if Wisdom be accepted as a personification of Christ.)

Surely it was out of love and mercy in glory that Christ was foreordained a Lamb before the foundation of the world (1. Peter 1: 19, 20).

God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1: 4); and gave us grace in Christ Jesus before the world began (2Tim 1: 9); and He promised eternal life before the world began (Titus 1: 2).

There was also a "hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory" (1Cor 2-7). And in Eph 3: 10, 11, we find the Church is to make known to principalities and powers "the manifold wisdom of God according to His eternal purpose, which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It is worthy, of notice, that the blessings so revealed are all connected with the saints of the present time: grapes for us designed in detail long before the provisional man was created—a cluster of infinite richness, grown in a far higher Hebron, the perfection of time prior to man's wilful Zoan, that refused the testimony of God. What an uncovering of the heart of God it is, here to see how He had anticipated man's need of atonement, and also had treasured up proofs of *the* love that God essentially is. And this display of divinity in such purposes is *all for us*.

Has faith fed on this divine store? Remember, the grapes grew in the valley; giants lived on the hill top. Then eat the grapes where Gbd provides them, i.e., in lowliness and humility, not in pride of heart. What hast thou that thou didst not receive? And assuredly, if so eaten, they will give strength to mount the hill, and successfully fight any Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, who would debar us from possessing the full inheritance.

What an immoveable joy it is, in the midst of all that changes here, to know that "Hebron" was built seven years before "Zoan." "The counsel of Jehovah standeth for ever" (Psalm 33: 11). Man and his fickleness surround us, and we know not what a day may bring forth. "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless, the counsel of Jehovah, that shall stand" (Prov 19-21). And God has written out His purposes in Christ towards us, and showed us how they were eternally settled before we, or the earth, existed. Nothing that can spring in time can

touch or alter the full accomplishment of these, His eternal intentions. God's own law, which was 430 years after the covenanted promises, could not disannul them. Nor can anything of man and of the adversary together, interfere with the completion of all that our gracious God has prepared for them that love Him. "Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt." Rough waves and stormy winds will not shake the Hebron of our God. Zoan and Anakim alike must, all give way, but Hebron becomes the possession of one who claimed it in faith, and was as strong, even for war, at 85 as at 40, the secret of whose strength is,— "If so be Jehovah be with me." Dauntless Caleb; that, and that alone, is your infinite ability!

What hearts arewearing his noble escutcheon to-day? "If so be Jehovah be with me." "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts."

It will be found that the most simply dependent soul is the one that most enjoys the grapes of Hebron.

Finally, as to Hebron; the city itself—not the suburbs—was given to the High priest for residence. This recalls Abram's altar, and revives the connection with worship that first belonged to Hebron. Presently, the failure of the priesthood brings in the kingdom, and David began to reign in Hebron. Royalty and worship are thus linked with the locality. It will not now be long before the Priest and King, with His joint-heirs, shall reign gloriously. Wise men scoff, intelligence scorns, when His speedy coming is referred to; but "Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt." "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise." No jot or tittle of the counsels of blessing, figured in Hebron's grapes, can possibly fail. Better far be a fool in the eyes of this world, than miss the revelation in glory with the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven.

Hebron? or Zoan? Which has your vote and interest now? That built by God from eternity, or man's clever erection in time? The divine and immutable, or the human, handsome bubble? The unseen and eternal, or the seen and temporal?

#### HEBRON

and the blood of the Lamb, as chosen in Him, with grace in Christ Jesus and eternal life, and Wisdom unto our glory, which is shortly to be revealed.

#### ZOAN

and princes of this world that come and counsellors so blind that they reject God's wonders; Pharaoh and hosts so skilful, their wheels betray them, and all are drowned, for the wise in their own craftiness.

May He who built Hebron show to His saints how the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins, *that He might deliver us out of this present evil world*, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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