

BES RAUMA: A BIBLICAL SYMBOL II

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Abstract: Paul Kalluveettil, in Part I of his contribution that appeared in the last issue, discussed Mount Moriah, Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion as the biblical symbols of *Beth Rauma*. In Part II of the study, he explores the biblical symbols of Mount Carmel, which is the symbol of the battle field of righteousness, place of true worship, place of Covenant Renewal and the place of blessing; the Mountain of the Lord Almighty, which is the place of banquet; God's Mountain, which is the place of proclaimers of Good News, *shalom*, *thob* and *Yesuah*; Mount Tabor, place of Transfiguration, where the face of the Son of Man shone like the sun; Mount Golgotha, which is the place of suffering and the place of glory; and Mount Olives, which is the Mount of Ascension. The author finds all these reflected in the writings of Chavara with ample references given to them.

Keywords: Carmel, mountain, Tabor, prophets, Canaanite, apostasy, Mahabharata, *Pandavas*, *Kurukshetra*, Elijah, *Beth Rauma*, sacrifice, Baal, liturgy, cult, clergy, seminarians, faithful, Promised Land, prophecy, Transfiguration, Moses, Calvary, suffering, Golgotha, Jerusalem, Mary, ascension.

In the last issue of the *Herald of the East* (volume 13, issue 1) we discussed Mount Moriah, Mount Horeb, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion as the biblical symbols of *Bes Rauma*. In this essay, we study the biblical symbols of Mount Carmel, the Mountain of the Lord Almighty, God's Mountains, Mount Tabor, Mount Golgotha and Mount Olives.

7.5. Mount Carmel

Mount Carmel extends North-West to within 200 yards of the Mediterranean Sea. It means garden, vineyard or orchard (Is 10:18; 16:10). The term reflects the fertility of Mount Carmel's slopes. The beauty of this mountain is celebrated in the Bible. Song of Songs 7:5 says the loved one's "head crowns you like Carmel..." It was here that the prophet Elijah assembled the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah, through whom Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab

was spreading the Canaanite cult in Israel. The true prophet of Yahweh had vehemently opposed it and proclaimed severe famine throughout the country (1 Kgs 17:1). He had to hide himself from the wrath of Ahab. It was after three years of draught that Elijah appeared before the King, rebuked him for the apostasy, and asked him to summon the false prophets and people at Mount Carmel. The scene is depicted in 1 Kgs 18:19-45. There Carmel appears as the symbol of *Kurukshetra* (the battle field of righteousness), place of true worship, place of Covenant Renewal and the place of blessing.

7.5.1. *Kurukshetra*

Mahabharata Epic narrates how *Pandavas*, the men of righteousness fought against the huge and militarily well-equipped army of the wicked *Kauravas*, defeated and annihilated them with the help of Lord Krishna. Mount Carmel was another *Kurukshetra*. Elijah, with the divine help, slaughtered all the prophets of Baal and Asherah at Kishon Valley (1 Kgs 18:40). Thus he tried to eradicate the religious evil from Israel.

Kuriakose Elias Chavara (henceforth KEC) and his companions stayed at *Bes Rauma*, and ceaselessly fought against the religious, social, economic, cultural, cultic and illiteracy evils that had crept into the Kerala society, such as discrimination, alienation, dominance of caste and gender, ignorance and poverty. They themselves were men of righteousness and persons of singular devotion and God-centeredness. It made them new Elijahs, those who were zealously zealous for the Lord God Almighty (in Syriac: *methen thenes I^e Maria Alaha hylsana* (1 Kgs 19:10, 14). The Hebrew name *Eliyahu* ("My God is Yahweh") befitted them. The inhabitants of *Bes Rauma* stood for the biblical God of justice and compassion. They were the living images of Christ, the new Elijah, whom the zeal for the Father's house consumed (Jn 2:17). They did not have recourse to earthly weapons or worldly strategies. Rather, they took up the shield of faith, with which they could extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one, took the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." (Eph 6:13-17). It was indeed Christ, the divine warrior who led the warfare.

7.5.2. Place of True Sacrifice

At Mount Carmel, Elijah flung down a challenge to the prophets of Baals: "Prepare the bull, but do not light the fire; let then call on the name of their gods, so that fire may come down from heaven and burn

up the sacrifice" (1 Kgs 18:22-29). Accordingly, the prophets of Baals called on the name of the deity, shouting and dancing and cutting themselves from morning till evening, but to no avail. Thereby the people understood that Baals were not true gods, and the so-called sacrifices to them were fake and ineffective. Then, Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord, dug a trench round it and asked the people to fill it with water, as well as pour water on the offering and on the wood. At the earnest prayer of Elijah Yahweh sent fire, and burnt up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and soil and also licked up the water in the trench (1 Kgs 18:30-38). Thus, the prophet proved that Yahweh was the only true God, who can work wonders. One has to offer sacrifice to Him alone.

The inhabitants of *Bes Rauma* not only offered the authentic sacrifice of Christ, but also made their lives a living sacrifice. KEC dedicated himself to restore the Syro-Malabar liturgy, wrote down its rubrics, and helped the priests to celebrate the authentic sacrifice of Christ in the parish churches. He and his companions taught the seminarians and the people how to actively participate in the Divine Liturgy, and make their life a living sacrifice together with Christ, the High Priest.

7.5.3. Place of Covenant Renewal

By adhering to the Baal cult the people of Israel had broken the covenant relationship with Yahweh. In His place they had accepted Baal as their overlord. On Mount Carmel, the prophet confronted the people: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him" (18:21). But the people kept silent. Now Elijah demonstrated the uniqueness of the Lord. It was an invitation to the people to recommit themselves to Yahweh. They immediately and spontaneously responded: Falling prostrate they loudly declared: "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God" (18:39). In the Ancient Orient the treaties or covenants were ratified by act and word that avowed the relationship with the sovereign. Now Israel, the inferior partner of the covenant, knelt down – an act that demonstrated their slave-like status before the Lord Almighty. By the oral declaration (twice repeated formula "the Lord, He is God") they asserted that Yahweh is their only God, whom they willingly and joyfully recognize as all of all and all in all of their life. It was they who had broken their covenant relationship. Now they take the steps (of course prompted by Yahweh) to reaffirm their total submission and subservience.

The Servants of Mary Immaculate of Mount Carmel faithfully and devotedly lived the new covenant life. They totally dedicated themselves to the Triune God. By words and actions, the community avowed *Mar walah* ("you are my Lord and my God"), the proclamation of Thomas (Jn 20:28). The Apostle of India was thereby re-establishing the broken covenant on behalf of the other apostles. The Congregation at *Bes Rauma* was doing the same thing. They lived the life of the disciples of Christ. By preaching and charitable activities KEC and his companions brought a radical renewal in the life of secular clergy, the seminarians and the faithful. All were attracted to the new covenant life of the inhabitants of *Bes Rauma*, and many became the members of the religious community. This paved the way for a new spiritual dawn in the life of Syro-Malabar Church.

7.5.4. Place of Blessing

At the covenant renewal declaration of the people of Israel, the cause for famine ceased. Yahweh was willing to bless the people and the country by sending rain. Elijah foretold King Ahab of this fact. As the sign of the ratification of the relationship with the Lord, he asked Ahab to take part in the covenant meal and rush to Jezreel before rain overtakes him (1 Kgs 18:41-45).

Then Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. He, the mediator between God and people was earnestly praying for the blessing of rain. Elijah had complete trust in his divine Master. Now and then he was asking his servant to go and look towards the sea, to find out any trace of the coming rain. At the seventh time the servant reported the sky growing black with clouds. Yahweh blessed Elijah for his persevering prayer of petition on behalf of the people. It rained cats and dogs. The power of the Lord came upon the man of God, and tucking his cloak into his belt, he ran ahead of the royal chariot all the way to Jezreel (18:46).

KEC and companions were serving as mediators of the new covenant blessing for the country. At *Bes Rauma* they spent long hours in prayer and penance to obtain the divine graces. Putting their trust in the new covenant Overlord they persevered in the long vigils. The inhabitants of *Bes Rauma* taught the faithful to adhere to the Lord in incessant prayer, like the widow in Lk 18:1-8. They thus obtained the divine blessings – not only spiritual, but also social, financial, cultural and religious graces for the whole land. These sons of prophet Elijah also served as the herald of the good news of the divine blessings.

7.6. The Mountain of the Lord

7.6.1. Text

“On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all people, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain, He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; He will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken” (Is 25:6-8).

7.6.2. The Place of Banquet

In the Ancient Orient when a new king was crowned, there used to take place an inaugural banquet to which the people were invited. The text speaks in this background. A new era of salvation will be dawned. This prophecy is oriented towards Christ, the universal Redeemer. All the humans are urged to hilariously partake of sumptuous banquet prepared at the mountain of the Lord by the Almighty himself. Yahweh will wipe away the tears from the face of the participants. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will pass away.

In the Gospels, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to royal banquet (Mt 22:1, 8-11; Lk 14:15; 13:28-29). In Lk 22:16, 18 the Son of Man says that He will not eat the Passover or drink again of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes. At the Last Supper, which was consummated at Mount Calvary, Jesus gave his body and blood as the food and drink, that provide everlasting life (Jn 6:35,58; 4:13-14; 7:37-38). Christ, by his death defeated the curse of death (Rom 6:4; 1 Cor 15:12-57; 1 Thes 4:14; Rev 1:17, 18; 21:1-4). The last of these texts speaks of a new heaven and a new earth, the realization of the promise of the Son of God.

We may compare *Bes Rauma* to the Mountain of the Lord Almighty. Its inhabitants, who represented the people, relived the new Passover and enjoyed the spiritual banquet with joy, praise, gratitude and worship. KEC and the companions broke the Word of God, and fed the faithful. *Bes Rauma* embodied the new heaven and the new earth, the symbol of the new humanity, where the lord Almighty wipes every tear from the people’s eyes. All could enjoy salvific bliss, finding their heaven on earth.

7.7. God's Mountains

7.7.1. Text

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace (*shalom*), who proclaims good (*thob*), who proclaims salvation (*yesuah*), who says to Zion, Your God reigns!" (Is 52:7).

7.7.2. Place of Proclaimers of Good News, *Shalom*, *Thob*, *Yesuah*

Isaiah was speaking to his people, the captives in Babylon. They had lost the land and the Temple – the symbols of their national and religious entity and identity. In this desperate situation the prophet was sent to proclaim to them the gospel of a new exodus that will bring them back to the Promised Land. The original words in Hebrew radiate exultation. Isaiah announces the coming of the messenger of salvation in poetic terms. His feet are compared to the beautiful feet of the bride of the Song of Songs, since he bears an enchanting and captivating message. Like the bridegroom of the Song of Songs 2:8, he comes leaping upon the mountains. The messenger has become transformed into the joyful message. His whole person is irradiating the bliss of salvation that carries *shalom*, *thob* and God's reign. This prophecy found its fulfilment in Christ, the great proclaimer of the good news.

The inmates of *Bes Rauma*, with heart and soul endeavoured to realize the dream of their divine Master. They were transformed into the living good news of *yesuah*, *shalom* and *thob*. God reigned in their hearts. KEC and companions converted *Bes Rauma* into the abode of good news, of divine welfare (*shalom*), of divine beauty (*thob*) and blissful salvation. The people experienced this truth, and tried their best to appropriate the divine blessings into their life.

7.8. Mount Tabor

7.8.1. Context

At the prediction of the Master's suffering and death (Mt 16:21-28), the apostles became very depressed, as their future dreams were shattered. In order to fortify them with the reality of glorious resurrection, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John to the Mount Tabor. There he was transfigured (Mt 17:1-8).

7.8.2. Place of Transfiguration

The face of the Son of Man shone like the sun, his clothes became as white as the light. Two OT figures, Moses and Elijah were found conversing with Jesus. The transfiguration scene was intended to imprint in the minds of the disciples the true significance of the Calvary event. Suffering is indeed glorification; cross is crown; failure is success. The authentic followers of Christ have to participate in his sufferings, and thus become transfigured ones. For them, Mount Calvary means Mount Tabor. Such a vision will transform the sons of men into sons of God.

The inmates of *Bes Rauma* were given the grace to live as transfigured ones like their Master. They had graced with an intuitive vision of the celestial face of suffering. Hence KEC and companions wholeheartedly embraced the cross of Christ. They fostered a deep devotion to the Crucified One, and tried their best to resemble Him by mortifying their bodies through severe fasting and penance. It made their faces radiant like that of Moses who spent forty days in the company of Yahweh, Ex 34:29-30. One can compare it also with the glorious countenance of Jesus, the new Moses who spent forty days in prayer and penance, and in conversation with the heavenly Father (Mt 4:1-2). The inmates, through their lives, words and deeds, taught the people how to transform their Calvarys into Tabors.

7.9. Mount Golgotha

According to John, Golgotha, the place of suffering was the place of glory. There Jesus became the king of heaven and earth. It is he who willingly carried his cross, underwent the mortal pains and gave up his spirit (Jn 19:17-28, 30). There Jesus consummated the new covenant.

KEC offers a radically new vision on Mount Golgotha. For the mystic it is the wedding tent, the mansion of celebration (*kalyaṇapantal*) of Christ, the divine Bridegroom, and the cross, the bridal chamber (*maṇavara*) of glory. The *bhaktayogi* looks at the Lord's march to Calvary, and ascending on the cross from the perspective of *Song of Songs*. Jesus is the Spouse. In his booklet, *Colloquies*, KEC gives a vivid and mystical articulation to the divine Bridegroom's march to *kalyaṇapantal*, and his solemn entrance into *maṇavara*. Also in his work *Compunction of the Soul* the poet gives a dazzling account of the nuptial procession to Calvary, the wedding tent (VIII/13-14; 70-104). It is indeed amazing to note that elsewhere KEC was narrating the earlier

parts of the passion in a pathetic and hypersensitive way. Now suddenly he changes his tone and provides a mystical articulation to the glorious and nuptial perspective of the Mount Calvary. This is indeed a model for the Syro-Malabar Christians who are used to shed bitter tears at the Good Friday (which is for them *Dukha Velli*) Liturgy.

7.9. Mount of Olives

7.9.1. Texts: Lk 24:50; Acts 1:9-12

On the Mount of Olives, the Risen Christ was taken up into heaven before the very eyes of the disciples; they were looking intently up into the sky as he was going.

7.9.2. Mount of Ascension

The Mount of Olives got its name from the olive trees which grew on its slope. It is situated to the East of Jerusalem. The triumphal entry of Jesus into the city began on this mount (Mt 21:1ff; Mk11:1ff; Lk 19:28ff). He left the world from Mount of Olives, and ascended to his Father. The disciples were enchanted by this sight, and continued to look into the heaven. The angels filled them with trust saying that the ascended Lord will come back to them in glory to take them up to heaven. At this the disciples returned with joy and spent the days in prayer under the leadership of Mother Mary in expectation of the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:12-14).

For KEC and his companions, *Bes Rauma* was the symbol of Mount of Olives. They lived there fixing their eyes on heaven, making their own the words of Rev 22:20: "Come, Lord Jesus (*Mārān 'āttā*)" – the incessant *mantra* of the Early Church. Although they lived in the world, they did not belong to the world (Heb 11:8-10). Like Abraham, the father of the salvation history, they rejoiced at the thought of seeing Christ's day; they saw it and were glad (Jn 8:56). Mary, the Mother of the Church was their leader, guide, protector, councillor and mediator. The inmates converted *Bes Rauma* into the upper room of Zion (Acts 1:13) from where hymns of praise, honour and thanksgiving were continuously ascending to heaven. KEC and the confreres practised the Eastern worshipping act of prostration, avowing that they were mere dust and ashes (Job 42:6). Their exemplarily life attracted many secular priests and seminarians to embrace this life of contemplation in action. Also the faithful got inspiration to make their home a place of ascension