

The Threshing Floor of Ornan the Jebusite

1 Chronicles 21.

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It is an affecting and solemn truth presented to us by scripture, to which we desire that our thoughts may ever be fully subject, that our God has, through our transgression, been separated from His due place, as over the work of His own hands; that this world, which is all His handy work, has acknowledged another god and prince. (John 14: 13; 1 Cor. 4: 4) Since the day when the Lord God walked with Adam in paradise, He has had no abiding place* among us. He has visited the earth in diverse manners, to bring mercies to His chosen in the midst of it, but when His errand of love has been finished, He has, as is said, "gone His way" again. (Gen. 18: 33) He would, it is true, have found a place among His chosen Israel, but He was even by them too speedily disowned, and His tarrying there proved to be but that of a way-faring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night. (Jer. 14: 8) "The ox knoweth his owner," said the God of Israel by His prophet, "and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." (Isa. 1: 3)

*[God dwelt in the holiest, only after redemption, in figure. Now that redemption is real and eternal by Christ, He dwells in us by His Spirit for ever. ED.]

But the Lord's title to the earth of course stands unimpeachable; "the cattle on a thousand hills" are His, "the earth, and the fulness thereof;" and accordingly in one way or another, He has been making continual claim to it in the face of the usurper, so as to express His purpose of finally taking it into full possession again. This indeed was so clearly intimated by the first promise, that the whole creation is represented as hoping and waiting for it. (Gen. 3: 15; Rom. 8: 19-21) And so in the day of the kingdom of our God, these hopes of the creation shall not be ashamed, for the "heavens shall then rejoice, and the earth be glad, the sea and the fulness thereof; the field shall then be joyful and all that is therein: the floods, and the hills, and the trees of the wood shall rejoice before the Lord."

By tracing for a while the dealings of the Lord with this world of ours, we may discern the ways in which He has been pleased, since the day when man sold himself and his inheritance into the hand of a strange lord, thus to claim the earth as His. When the giants of old had finished the antediluvian apostacy, corrupting the earth and filling it with violence, doing with it as if it were their own, the Lord asserted His right by judging that generation as oppressors and wrong-doers. (Gen. 6: 1-13)

Then in the new world He witnessed His title to the earth by making man the tenant of it under Himself, delivering it into the hand of Noah, under express condition imposed according to His own good pleasure. (Gen. 9: 1-7) And again, when these children of men, doing the deeds of their fathers, affected independency of God their rightful Lord, as they did in the matter of Babel, He again asserted His right in the way of judgment, scattering the confederates over the face of the earth. (Gen. 11: 1-9)

But the Lord in His fruitful sovereign wisdom had now another mode of continuing His claim to the earth. This scattering of the nations from Babel He so orders as to have respect to His setting up one of them as the future witness of His name and rights. (Deut. 32: 8, 9) And in the mean time He separates the father of this nation to Himself (Gen. 12: 1), making him also personally the witness of the same truth — that let the peoples imagine what vain things they might, Jehovah, and He alone, was "possessor of heaven and earth." (Gen. 14: 18-22)

Accordingly then, when in due course of providence Abraham's nation was manifested, the Lord who had chosen them to be His witnesses, puts them into possession of a portion of the earth, to hold it under Him their Lord; thus showing that He, who took what portion He pleased, had title to the whole; as He says, "Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people, for all the earth is mine." (Ex. 19: 5) And Israel thus established as God's people should have continued in the midst of, but separated formally from, the nations, reflecting the light of God's glory as King of all the earth. But again and again they revolted, and rejected Jehovah Christ from being King over them. The nation first (1 Sam. 8: 7), then the house of David (Isa. 8: 13, Jer. 21: 12), give up their testimony to God; and at length the wicked husbandmen cast the heir himself out of the vineyard, and slew, him. (Matt. 21: 39)*

*I may observe that Israel was also taught by the ordinance of tithes, that they held their land as of the Lord; for it was as a rent payable by a tenant. Rabbi Bechai accordingly says on Deut. 14: 23, "If thou pay the tithe, then it is thy corn; if not, it is mine" (i.e., the Lord's); as it is said also in Hosea, "therefore will I return and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my vine in the season thereof." (Hosea 2: 9). (See Jennings's Jewish Antiquities, p. 206.)

Abraham's seed thus refused to do the works of Abraham, and then Abraham's God abandoned their land, leaving the boar out of the wood to waste it, and the wild beast of the field to devour it. But the Lord has had pity for His holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, and has called forth another witness to the glory of it. By the voice of heralds He is publishing "Jesus and the resurrection," opening the heavenly places and the Father's house to all believers, and letting all men know, that the kingdoms of the world are to become His, and that all things are to be put under His feet again. (Heb. 2: 8; Rev. 11: 15)

But how is the kingdom of the world to become the Lord's? And how is His presence to be preserved among us? We can prepare Him no habitation or dominion; for we have been found unable even to retain that which in His love He once committed to us. The Lord then must, and so He will, prepare Himself a place over and among the children of men, so as to secure His presence and authority (O blessed expectation) from ever being clouded or denied again.

When the Lord took Israel of old, as we have seen, to be His peculiar people, of course He prepared Himself a place among them — the tabernacle first, and then the temple. The tabernacle was but a moveable pavilion; there Jehovah dwelt as between curtains, and walked as in a tent, refusing with in. finite grace to enter into His rest while His Israel sojourned from one nation to another people. (2 Sam. 7: 5-8) But the temple was fixed; for when Israel was brought into the land of their covenant, and all their enemies had been reduced, then the Lord would enter into rest among them. In their affliction having been afflicted, He would now rejoice in their joy (Isa. 63: 9); and He, whom the heaven cannot contain, seated Himself in the midst of His chosen nation.

But where was the honoured spot? Who of us that clings with all desire (as, if we be saints, we at least should) to the hope of God's restored presence and kingdom in this world, that would not but know something of it? I speak not of what travellers have told us of it, but how the oracles of God mark it out. And from them we learn this simple story of it, that it had been the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite; and it was the place where the angel of God stayed his destructive course through the city of Jerusalem, whither he had been summoned by the sin of the king and the people. It was this spot which became the place of the temple, and most fitly so, as we shall see, if we can a little more narrowly survey the ground, as it is spread out before us by the Spirit of God in 1 Chr. 21: 1-6.

"And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. And David said unto Joab and the elders of the people, Go number Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan, and bring the number of them to me

that I may know it. And Joab answered, The Lord make this people an hundred times so many more than they be; but my Lord the king, are they not all my Lord's servants? Why then doth my lord require this thing? Why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel? Nevertheless the king's hand prevailed against Joab. Wherefore Joab departed and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem. And Joab gave the sum of the number unto David; and all they of Israel were a thousand thousand, and a hundred thousand men, that drew sword; and Judah was four hundred threescore, and ten thousand men, that drew sword. But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them, for the king's word was abominable to Joab."

At the time when this scene opens, the sword of David and of Israel had been victorious over all their enemies. The Philistines had been subdued — Moab had brought gifts — garrisons were put in Damascus; and the Syrians, as also the Edomites, had become David's servants. With all promised blessings the house of God's servant had been blest, and nought of the goodness of which the Lord had spoken to him had failed. "The fame of David went out into all lands, and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations."

But Satan, we here read, too soon serves himself of all this; and Israel proves again, that man, utterly without strength, is unable even to hold a blessing. The gifts with which their gracious Lord had thus endowed Israel, and which had been ordained for their comfort and His praise, became, through the craft and subtlety of the devil, an occasion to them of self-congratulation and pride, as to Adam of old. (Gen. 3: 1-8) For David's heart in all this was moved by the old lie — "ye shall be as gods." Any thing for poor fallen man but the living God! "Nay, but we will have a king to reign over us," said Israel to Samuel of old, rejecting Jehovah Christ, "that we also may be like all the nations." (1 Sam. 8: 19, 29) But the Lord will not give His glory to another: none have ever forsaken Him and prospered, as it is written, — "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, and stay on horses, and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord." (Isa. 31: 1) "The Egyptians shall help in vain and to no purpose." (Isa. 30: 7), David here, like Hezekiah afterwards, in the pride of his heart, would exhibit his magnificence, would survey his resources.

The infatuation in which David was sunk is marked by the fact of Joab expostulating with him; for (though a man of blood and eminently one of the children of this world, all his policy bespeaks him, yet wiser far in his generation, looking not to the ungodliness so much as to the impolicy of this purposed wickedness of the king) Joab at once discovers, that which his master refuses to see.

The whole system of Israel, by this national transgression, was now defiled and tainted, and ripe for severity or judgment. This pride was the giving up of God, and God would have been dealing righteously had He at once laid Israel aside, as He did Adam in such a case, — "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

1 Chr. 21: 7-14. "And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel. And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly because I have done this thing: but now I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant, for I have done foolishly. And the Lord spake unto Gad, David's seer, saying, Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the Lord, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them that I may do it unto thee. So Gad came to David and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Choose thee either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the Lord, even the pestilence in the land, and the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me. And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait; let me fall now into the hand of the Lord, for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man. So the Lord sent pestilence upon Israel, and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men."

For nine long months the pride of the king's heart deceived him (2 Sam. 24: 8); as alas! lust had

before dimmed his eye for the same time. He had too long walked in the ways of his heart and in the sight of his eyes; but after his hardness and impenitency was but treasuring up unto himself wrath against the day of the righteous judgment of God now about to be revealed. Sinners should be stopped in their course by the remembrance that God, though He suffers long, "has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness."

But David, as a child of God, might be tempted, overtaken in a fault, and thus brought to shame and grief, but could not be left impenitent (Luke 22: 32). And so Israel as God's nation could not be consumed, because God's gifts and calling are without repentance (Rom. 11: 29), because His compassion towards them could not fail (Lam. 3: 22). Their transgressions were to be visited with a rod, and their iniquity with stripes, but the divine loving-kindness was not to be utterly taken from David and his nation (Ps. 89: 33). Correction is ever in covenant love. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, and therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos. 3: 2). To walk comfortably and without interruption as in an even path, we must walk watchfully as with the Lord. Had David walked in his integrity, and humbly with his God, he would have been spared this discipline; but now "he must bear the rod." And he is required to choose the rod; by this, much grace might be exercised in his soul; he would by this be brought to consider well the fruit of his transgressions, and thus be more humbled and broken in spirit, and he would also have occasion to encourage himself afresh in the Lord who was slaying him, as we find he did.

But corrected he must be, and that too, just in the place of his transgression; having boasted of his thousands, his thousands must be diminished. God would now number to the sword whom David had numbered to his pride. And so the day of the Lord is to be upon every one that is proud and lifted up (Isa. 2: 12).

1 Chr. 21: 15. "And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it; and as he was destroying, the Lord beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the Lord stood by the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite."

In this verse we have the threshing-floor of Ornan first brought within view, a mean spot in itself, but destined of the Lord to be the joy of the whole earth; the place of the glory, the rest of God and His Israel. It presents itself to us at once, as the witness of that blessed precious truth, which is the sure ground of all our hopes, that with our God "mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (James 2: 13). The whole system of Israel had, as we have observed, exposed itself to the severity or displacing judgment of the Lord; He might have broken it at once as a vessel wherein was no pleasure; He might have taken away His vineyard from His unthankful and wicked husbandmen. But "mercy rejoiceth against judgment" in the bosom of their God. He repents Him of the evil with which His people "because of their transgressions and because of their iniquity were now afflicted;" and He commands the destroying angel to stay His hand by this threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

Here the same mercy displays itself as that which shone out on ruined condemned Adam in the garden. He had there no plea to plead with the Lord: all that remained for him was to fly and be concealed, if that were possible, when in the bosom of the Lord mercy rises over judgment; and He decrees that "the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head" (Gen. 3: 15). Often do the scriptures, as here, present our faithful God and Father, opening as it were His own heart, and showing His thoughts to His people how kind they are; as He, says *within* Himself concerning the husbandmen of His vineyard, "what shall I do? I will solid my beloved son" (see also Jer. 3: 19). Oh! that we may drink at this fountain of Israel, the love of the Father — the spring-head of all the healing waters that visit us.

1 Chr. 21: 16-17. "And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand, stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces; and David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee, O Lord my God, be on me and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued."

David as yet was not given to read the secrets of his God and Saviour: the grace that was rejoicing in the bosom of his covenant God over him, was not as yet opened to him; all that he saw was the fearful agent of death and ruin hanging over his city and people. And Oh! how often an afflicted soul is thus reduced, how often does the eye fix itself on the cloud that darkens all around, without a single glimpse of the bright and peaceful heavens that lie beyond it, not knowing or refusing to know

"The clouds they so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on their head."

1 Chr. 21: 18. "Then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the Lord in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

"If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1: 9). The relief for David in this dark hour is announced by the angel of destruction. The eater himself yields meat, the strong man sweetness; the law itself prophesied of Jesus who was to displace it, as here the altar was to displace the angel who directed it.

An altar needs a priest or an accepted worshipper the Lord would not have directed the one, if he had not provided the other. "The Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering" (Gen. 4: 4). His person was first accepted, and then His sacrifice; and here the Lord's readiness to receive an offering at the hand of David was a pledge that David himself, through mercy rejoicing against judgment, had been received, and his iniquity put away. If the Lord had been pleased to kill him, he would not have received a burnt-offering at his hand (Mal. 1: 10-13).

1 Chr. 21: 19-26. "And David went up at the saying of Gad which he spake in the name of the Lord. And Ornan turned back and saw the angel: and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat, and as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David and went out of the threshing-floor; and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground. Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshing-floor, that I may build an altar therein unto the Lord; thou shalt grant it me for the full price, that the plague may be stayed from the people; and Ornan said unto David, Take it to thee and let my Lord the king do that which is good in his eyes; lo, I give thee the oxen for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meals offering: I give it all. And king David said, Nay but I will verily buy it for the full price; for I will not take that which is thine for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings without cost. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight: and David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the name of the Lord; and He answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering."

These verses present to us David's thankful believing acceptance of the mercy revealed to him. He received not the grace of God in vain. He at once went up at the saying of the prophet, while Ornan and his sons hid themselves from the angel. Here we may observe, that while no flesh can stand naked, as in its own resources, before the Lord, yet that sinners may come fully up to His heavenly presence in the power of simply believing in His grace. Ornan and David here illustrate this. Ornan had not the grace of the Lord revealed to him, he knew nothing of the altar that was to be set up in his threshing-

floor and therefore — as nakedly a creature in the sight of God, like Adam before in such a case — he hid himself. But David knew the remedy which mercy rejoicing against judgment had provided, and therefore he dares to stand, though shamed and humbled; without distraction he fulfils his appointed service, he purchases the threshing-floor, prepares the altar, offers his offering, and calls upon the Lord. The sword still unsheathed has no alarms for him now; believing, he is not ashamed or confounded; he stands to see God's salvation; his soul is brought simply to be a receiver of grace which God Himself brings nigh to him. Hence we see, in all his action, no disturbance or motion of the flesh; but all is the assurance and quietness of faith resting in the word of the Lord. And the Lord gives him his answer before he calls, and hears him while he is yet speaking (Isa. 65: 24).

1 Chr. 21: 27. "And the Lord commanded the angel, and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof."

The reconciliation was complete; being justified by faith, there was peace for David with God. As the accusings of the adversary, the demands of the law, the complaints and howlings of conscience, are all and for ever silenced by the voice of the blood of sprinkling, which tells us that with our God "mercy rejoiceth against judgment;" so, as soon as David had trusted in this grace, as soon as he had built his altar in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, where mercy had thus rejoiced, the angel of destruction puts up his sword again into the sheath thereof, at the commandment of the Lord.

1 Chr. 21: 28-30. "At that time when David saw that the Lord had answered him in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of the Lord which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt-offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon. But David could not go before it to enquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the Lord."

David was given grace to interpret the writing on the Jebusite's floor. That mystic sacred plan had brightly reflected the glory of forgiving love; there he had seen that with his God "mercy rejoiceth against judgment" — the oft repeated but ever sweet and blessed truth. Close therefore by this floor he keeps. The corn which his faith had trodden down there was the finest wheat, the very fat of the kidneys of wheat; and, having tasted it, he dared not to forsake his own mercy; having fed at an altar whereon had been spread for him the dainties of a Father's love, he could not return to serve the tabernacle (Heb. 13: 10). He had not feared to prepare his altar in the angel's presence, but he does fear now to return by the way of the angel's sword. "This is the house of the Lord God," said he of Ornan's floor, "and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel" (1 Chr. 22: 1). His heart, by the Spirit who over witnesses to grace, was knit to the spot; and he proceeds at once to make preparation to link the name of the God of Israel inseparably with it also. What Moses had given them should be no more remembered or sought unto: in grace the system should be set and confirmed; and Israel and their God should meet for ever where mercy had rejoiced against judgment.

Here, with David we also meditate for awhile, and trace our interest in all this precious truth. Our souls, if we are saints of God, will breathe, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? but there is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared" or worshipped. (Ps. 130: 3. 4) All service of the name of our God comes of this; and our thankful acceptance of forgiveness, sealed as it is to all who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, is our entrance into His temple, our assumption of that character in which alone we can do service in the heavenly temple, that is, *of pardoned sinners*. We are to know no affection at variance with such a character. None else gives full glory to God. We stand in presence of a mercy-seat, before a throne of largest richest grace, and yet of brightest untainted righteousness, because of blood in which God smells a savour of rest is on it, through which He can be just, and yet let mercy rejoice against judgment (Gen. 8: 21; Rom. 3: 26; Eph. 5: 2).* "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb" are the temple in our heavens." ["Salvation to our

God" is the burthen of worship by and by; "blessing, and honour, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever," will "every creature" say in that day.]

*As David would stand only by Ornan's floor where mercy had visited him, so we abide only by the wounded side of Christ, which our sin, like the soldier's spear, had opened, but out of which mercy has brought forth blood and water to cleanse the sins away.

And as mercy through the Lord our righteousness has thus "raised us up, and made us sit in heavenly places" (Eph. 2: 6), so in the day when "all Israel shall be saved mercy shall in like manner rejoice in the lower parts of the earth. As the church is now set in grace, so will the people then be. That covenant, and that alone, which takes away sin through the Deliverer, shall establish them as it now establishes the saints; "for all are included in unbelief, that God may have mercy upon all" (Rom. 11: 26-32). Exodus 32 exhibits this truth, and most interestingly presents Israel as drawn forth, from their standing under Mount Sinai, to take their stand in the last days in and under Christ. And their last tenure of the land by grace will be the accomplishment of the promises made of old to their father Abraham; for the land and its accompanying blessings were given to him and to his seed, not as through the works of the law, but by promise or grace. The closing scenes of that lovely portion of the divine word give us the same truth in mystery. Moses veiled typifies Israel as *they are now*, and the flesh under law, or in blindness of heart (Isa. 6: 10). Moses unveiled typifies Israel *as they shall be*; (Rom. 11: 27; 2 Cor. 3: 16) and when the heart of the Jewish people shall thus "turn to the Lord," and the veil shall be taken away, this turning of Israel to Jesus shall be followed by the unveiling of the nations, or the life of the world (Isa. 27: 6; Rom. 11: 15).

This in the end shall all be established by grace, not only the children of the resurrection in the Father's house in the *heavens*, but Israel and the nations, "from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same," *on earth*.

Mercy shall be built up for ever" (Ps. 89: 2). With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee (Zion), saith the Lord thy redeemer"; and then shall Zion's children be many, and her seed shall inherit the Gentiles, *and the redeemer of Israel shall be called the God of the whole earth* (Isa. 54: 5-8). The Gentiles shall be embraced in the same mercy, for it is written, "In thee shall all nations be blessed;" and it is written again, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people" (Rom. 15: 10). Thus shall the whole earth be the extended floor of Oman the Jebusite, and be the altar and dwelling place of Him with whom mercy has rejoiced against judgment. Thus shall our God show the rich fulness of His wisdom, providing a way whereby He can be just and the justifier of Him that believeth in Jesus, — whereby He can preserve the righteousness of His throne in all its brightest glory, and yet allow mercy to rejoice against judgment, seating Himself in the earth as in His temple and kingdom. Mercy with righteousness, peace with truth, shall rear that temple, and uphold the kingdom; His shall all things be, not only by title, by creation, but by purchase, — "His" "peculiar treasure," His "purchased possession." Thus will the Lord fully repossess Himself of the world, and walk again among the children of men; the saints, who have acknowledged Him while absent, shall be acknowledged in His glory; "the righteous shall see it, and all iniquity shall stop her mouth" (Ps. 107: 42).