

Shechem

"And Abram passed through the land of Canaan unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh"—
Gen. 12:6.

IT WAS at this place God first appeared unto Abram in the land of Canaan. This was the inception of the Land Covenant which has become the basis of the Gospel message. The Lord said—

"Unto thy Seed will I give this land."

And in consequence of this glorious promise to the father of the faithful, the father of the Seed, we find that he builded an altar and sacrificed unto the Lord. Abram in these actions combined the basic principles of salvation.

We find that Abram passed through the land as a stranger and a wanderer, no fixed or permanent dwelling place. He came unto the place Sichem, Sychar or Shechem.

This name Sichem carried the idea of bowing down the shoulder to carry the burden, and also the thought of rising up early in the morning. We find a usage of the first thought in Jacob's blessing of Issachar his son (Gen. 49:14-15)—

"Issachar us a strong ass couching down between two burdens and he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant: and **bowed his shoulder** to bear, and became a servant unto tribute."

The original for "shoulder" in v. 15 is *shechem*.

While we are strangers and pilgrims, travelling through the land toward the promised rest, we are called to the position of servants. Christ said,

"I am among you as he that doth serve."

Certainly if we are followers of the Master as we should be, we will be servants, willingly bowing down the shoulder to serve one another. Paul said (Gal. 6:2-9)—

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ . . . Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

This is comprehended in our concern for our brethren and sisters; our desire to assist wherever possible, not becoming weary in well-doing. The principle is typified in the twelve men of the tribes of Israel taking a stone upon their shoulders—a stone each out of the midst of Jordan—and setting them up as a memorial in Gilgal. In this instance the word rendered "shoulder" is again *sichem* or *shechem*. The thought is *humble and willing service*.

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THE OTHER aspect of the word *sichem* is that which points to the reward of service in a faithful manner unto the end. "Rising up early in the morning" conveys the thought of resurrection. It is expressed in language which is taken from nature in a beautiful manner. Night speaks of sleep, or the period of trial and preparation. Morning is the awakening of all nature to a newness of life. The sun rising each day calls men forth to renewed activity in the service of God.

So also the coming of the Son of Man is referred to as the morning without clouds, the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. This is when all the sons of Faithful Abraham will, after having served in righteousness, be awakened to the glorious reality of the Kingdom Age. *All these thoughts are, by the Spirit, concealed in the expression—*

"Abram came to a place called Sichem."

The words, "Unto thy seed will I give this land," are an extension of the same glorious hope, when the service is transposed from probation to glorious exaltation in the Age to Come. Here again we see that *service does not end with the change of nature*. It is an extension of service, but on a vastly higher plane. The words of the prophet Isaiah (9:6), well-known to us all, teach this—

"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and **the government shall be upon his shoulder.**"

Once more the original word for shoulder is *sichem*. It combines the thought that through the faithful service of the Master he shall have the government of the Kingdom Age at his command, upon the throne of David to order it, and establish it, with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever.

Isaiah continues this theme in ch. 22:22—

"The key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open."

"Shoulder" once more comes from *sichem* in the Hebrew original. The reward herein expressed also applies to all those who pattern their lives after their Master—

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection . . . they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6).

This condition is predicated upon the mercy and forbearance of God. It can never be brought about by the unaided efforts of man.

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ONCE AGAIN we see the Spirit of God concealing the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in the narrative—

"Abram came unto the plain of Moreh" (Gen. 12:6).
And it immediately follows that—

"The Canaanite was then in the land" (v 6).

The Canaanite is a type of the Seed of the Serpent and stands for all who oppose the purpose of God, being descended from Ham, the son of Noah. This is the first mention of these people who stood in the way of the possession of the Promised land. The name Canaanite means "to vanquish, to humble, to subdue"—a fitting name for the works of the flesh which these people practised, and for which they were dispossessed under Joshua.

The fact that Abraham did not remain at Sichem appears to bear out the thought that the Canaanite immediately objected to his presence. Therefore we see the force of the promise which came at this place—

"Unto thy Seed will I give this land."

Such assurance would be needful to this man of faith, who had travelled approximately 1000 miles from his native land in obedience to the Divine command, a command to become a stranger and wanderer in a land that was not his, with no fixed habitation, dwelling in tents—in summer heat and winter cold—for 100 long years, in the patience and obedience of faith.

The assurance of Divine direction becomes all the more clear in the meanings attributed to the words, "plain of Moreh." "Plain" in this place comes from the Hebrew, *elyon* or *ayil* meaning "strength, or mighty." *Moreh* means "teacher."

Thus we see that the possession of the land was not to come by force of arms nor the arm of the flesh, but through the preaching of the Truth and ultimately by the power of God. *The real Canaanite to be overcome is the flesh, the body of sin in each one of us.* We must bring our bodies into subjection to serve the true and living God.

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THAT ABRAHAM comprehended this fact is shown by his moving on to *Bethel*, "the House of God," which at that time was called Luz. The Divine characteristic was afterwards illustrated in his willingly permitting Lot to choose which portion of the land he desired. This teaching is later set forth by what Christ told his disciples—

"When they persecute you in one city, flee ye to the next."

Our lives must be built entirely upon the principle of subjection and of living at peace with all men, as far as is within our power. Paul exhorts us similarly (1 Cor. 1:17-31):

"For Christ sent me . . . to preach the Gospel: not with the wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved (are **being** saved—RV) it is the power of God.

"For we preach Christ crucified . . . unto them that are called . . . Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption; that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

We meet week by week to remember the grace of God in calling us from the darkness of surrounding Babylon to the Word of His teaching; we being called to the plain (or strength) of Moreh to have faith in God. Let us follow then in the steps of Abraham, the father of the Faithful.

This place in the central part of the land of Palestine, seemed to act as the gateway to the promise. 190 years later we again find a pilgrim entering the land from Haran and coming to this place first, at the command of God—

"And the Lord said unto Jacob, Return to the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred, and I will be with thee."

Thus in Gen. 33:18 we read—

"And Jacob came to Shalem, a city (suburb) of Shechem (or Sichem) which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-Aram; and pitched his tent before the city."

It was there that he *bought a piece of land*, where he placed his tent. It was a move in the wrong direction, for he had yet to learn that as long as we remain in the flesh, the land of Canaan, we have no continuing city. He was soon to learn that association with the world is incompatible with a godly life.

"He pitched his tent BEFORE THE CITY."

The Mighty Teacher or Instructor now works in his life, as He does in the lives of all His servants, bringing about circumstances which are designed to develop characters in conformity with His holiness. Dinah, Jacob's daughter, went out "to see the daughters of the land" (Gen. 34:1)—which incident brought about the force of circumstances which *caused Jacob to become a wanderer again.*

The Divine protection is shown in the events recorded, for we see that the inhabitants of Shechem would have swallowed up Jacob and his family, saying among themselves:

"These men are peaceable with us; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein; for the land, behold, it is large enough for them . . .

"Shall not their cattle and their substance and every beast of theirs be ours?"

(Gen. 34:21-23).

We find then the Divine command to *move* (Gen. 35:1)—

"Arise, go to Bethel, and dwell **there**: and make there an altar unto God."

Before going on to the "House of God" we find a necessary cleansing or putting away of sin from amongst the house of Jacob, a putting off of the flesh in type. For Jacob said unto his household and all that were with him (Gen. 35:2-3):

"Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments, and let us arise and go up to Bethel."

This is a striking expression at such a time, but important in that it shows the understanding of Jacob of the things of the Truth, the fundamental separation and cleansing of all those who approach unto the house of the Lord. Coming as it does at Shechem, it speaks of this place as a separation point between the World and the Truth, a place of the cutting off of the flesh, of the works of sin, before we can acceptably approach unto God.

The national regathering of God's people is couched in almost identical language (Eze. 36:25-26)—

"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

"And I will put My spirit within you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them."

Paul makes the application on a much higher plane, showing that our bodies are the Temple of the living God—the "House of God"—*Bethel*. He tells us to—

"Come out from the unbelievers, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

And then, as in the case of Jacob, he exhorts (2 Cor. 7:1)—

"Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, **perfecting holiness** in the fear of God."

The necessity for a change of raiment is shown in the highest sense, even in the case of Christ. Zechariah the prophet shows the high priest Joshua "clothed with filthy garments." The angel in the vision shows that a change is necessary—

"Take away true filthy garments from him. And unto Joshua he said, Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment" (Zech. 3:3-4).

These events, referring to Joshua or Jesus the Saviour, have reference to the *removal of the condemned Adamic nature*, the Saviour having done no iniquity, neither was guile found in his mouth.

The application is also to all those who come unto God through the Saviour, who are to have their iniquities covered with the garments of salvation attained by the antitypical high priest "Joshua," or *Jesus*.

Thus we see the remarkable significance of these words of Jacob, as he returns to the land of his fathers. He went out empty and alone. He now returns full by the blessing of the Lord. With him came all his numerous family together with all their servants and helpers. To them, then, as they come to the land of promise as Gentiles into the Covenant, they are now commanded to put their idols away and prepare their hearts to seek the Lord.

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WE FIND that Jacob "hid the idols under the oak which was by Shechem" (Gen. 35:4). They were buried, or covered over, or hidden. Again we see that this location was a symbol of the cutting off of the flesh, a burial of the old man with its lusts and affections, a place of preparation before going up to the House of the Lord—to "Bethel."

The changing or "altering of the garments" brings to our attention the covering of iniquity by the provision of the Lord as distinct from that covering provided by the mind of the flesh. How important that we comprehend the necessity of the Divine covering, realize its teaching and understand all that is entailed therein! We will see in all the transactions of the Lord the scarlet thread of the Divine principle of salvation pointing forward to Jesus.

AS THE curtain goes down upon Jacob's descendants in Egypt we move on some 350 years to the days when Moses delivers his final exhortation and commandment to Israel in the plains of Moab.

Though not permitted to enter the land of Promise, the Spirit takes his thoughts to the northwest and causes him to make reference to Shechem in the purpose of the Lord.

The record is contained in Deut. 11:29-30 and also in Deut. 27. From these two chapters we obtain further information and description of the locality of Shechem. Moses had been instructing Israel of the blessings which would come upon them if they were obedient unto the Lord, and the curses which would be attendant upon disobedience—

"Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse—a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God—and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God" (Deut. 11:26-27).

And Moses, instructing Joshua at the same time, made reference to where the blessing and curse were to be enacted, in what appears on the surface as a peculiar observance: but *only so until we seek fully its meaning and significance*—

"Thou shalt put the blessing upon Mount Gerizim and the curse upon Mount Ebal. Are they not on the other side Jordan, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land, of the Canaanites, which dwell in the champaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains of Moreh."

These two mountains, *Gerizim* and *Ebal*, rise to the north and south of Shechem (the city nestling between the two heights) which rose about 3,000 feet above the Mediterranean Sea. We notice that Moses links these two mountains with the plain of Moreh—the oaks of *Moreh*—"Strong Teacher."

More force is added to the basic thought of the Instructor being the Father in the declaration or reading of the whole Law before the people at this place. This took place as we find in Joshua 8, before Israel had completely subdued or possessed the land. They were wanderers about the land, occupied in overcoming the nations of iniquity.

Before they could enter into the possession, there had to be this conquest of sin and a positive declaration of acceptance of the will of God after having it clearly pronounced.

The exactitude with which Moses' words were carried out is shown by what we read in Joshua 8:34-35—

"He read all the words of the Law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law.

"There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, **and the little ones**, and the strangers that were conversant among them."

With the reciting of each phrase of the Law the whole congregation declared their acceptance by a loud "AMEN."

Do we not see in these incidents our own calling and election in God's purpose? First the recognition of the necessity of overcoming sin in ourselves, the full acquaintance with the Law of God, the public declaration of acceptance of all its requirements. The final expression of Joshua shows the linking of Gentiles with Jews in what is foreshadowed:

"The **strangers** that were conversant (or walking with or) among them" (v. 35).

The thought behind the word *stranger* is "a foreigner or alien." Paul writing to the Ephesians about their (and our) natural condition, states—

"Remember, that ye being in time past, Gentiles in the flesh . . . without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

"But now in Christ Jesus, ye, who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:11-13).

It is through the blood of Christ that all are made nigh the covenants of promise to Abraham, whether Jews or Gentiles. For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly, but inwardly of the heart. (Rom. 2:29).

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TURNING AGAIN to Moses' description in Deut. 11, we find that these two mountains, Gerizim and Ebal, were over in the plain or champaign toward *Gilgal*. (This is another place of the same name as that near Jericho, where the Israelites of the wilderness were circumcised.)

The name *Gilgal* means "rolling"—the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt, the removal of the ways of darkness, a preparation for the possession of the land of Promise. It is therefore instructive and interesting to find the same thought conveyed in these significant events at Shechem, near Gilgal.

Mountains in Scripture are indicative of *nations and kingdoms*. This is illustrated by Isaiah 2:12-14—

"For the day of the Lord of Hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty . . .

"And upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up."

Dr. Thomas, referring to the possessing of the mountains or nations of the earth by the saints (Eur. 1, pgs. 63-64), says:

"The meeting the Lord in the air, as Paul expresses it, is in the style of Daniel, the Saints possessing the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven; which they cannot do until immortalized, or flesh and blood be changed to spirit. Neither will this dominion be possessed till it is conquered; for it is a great mountain, that has to be reduced in Zerubbabel's presence to a plain."

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The names of the two mountains themselves combine in impressing the lesson of Salvation and hope on the Divine basis. The name *Ebal*, means to "be bald or bare," while *Gerizim* means, "to be cut off." Applying these meanings in one sense, we have a picture of the Jews and Gentiles associated or called together into a meeting with Christ, the teacher sent from God. The Jews are the nation cut-off, while the Gentiles are shown in the unproductive sense.

But Paul shows the true branches, the nation of Israel, being cut off, and the unproductive wild branches being grafted into the true stock (Rom. 11:16-21), only to remain there if they changed to the nature of the true stock itself.

In another sense the name Gerizim applies to the Saviour and secondarily to the saints who follow in his steps. The word Gerizim comes from the Hebrew *Garaz*—to cut off. Christ pre-eminently in Scripture is the one spoken of as being cut off; the cutting off being the means of Jewish and Gentile salvation. It is primarily as a remembrance of this feature of the purpose of God that we meet week by week to partake of the memorials of bread and wine. Isaiah speaking of the sacrifice of Christ said (53:8)—

"He (Christ) was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken."

The same applies to the servants of God. They in degree must undergo the cutting off of the flesh, a life of service, wholly dedicated unto the Lord. This will bring trial and testing, a cutting off by the world, as the world in turn is cut off or shunned by the saints—

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (I John 2:15).

Mount Ebal also has application to the Law of Moses in its failure to bring life and salvation. The Law in itself was not bad, but holy, but it failed to bring life everlasting because of the weakness or inability of human nature to keep it in every respect. Paul said, writing to the Galatians (3:21-24)—

"Is the Law against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the Law . . .

"Wherefore the Law was our schoolmaster unto Christ, that we might be justified by the faith."

10— It was not to be by the works of the flesh. And as if to drive home the point Paul stated, ver.

"For as many as are of (the works of the Law) are under the curse: for it is written,
"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the Law to do them."

Paul was here quoting directly from Deut. 27, where the record of Moses speaks of the transactions of Shechem. It was upon Ebal that all the *curses* were to be pronounced.

Conversely we find that the *blessings* were to be pronounced upon Mount Gerizim. This links this mount with the covenants of Promise, the Abrahamic Covenant. The effect of this covenant is to bless and not to curse, even to bring blessedness to all the world (Gen. 22:18)—

"In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

But the cutting off aspect has been difficult for all to receive (John 12:32-34)—

"If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me. This Jesus said, signifying what death he should die.

"The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth forever: and how sayest thou, The Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this son of man?"

The blessings upon Mount Gerizim are only accomplished by the cutting off; those faithful under the Law can only be saved or have the curse removed by the sacrifice of Christ, they remove from the Ebal side of the valley to the Gerizim side. Those also of Gentile origin can also only cross the valley of death to the blessings of the covenant by association with the cutting off of the Saviour, by undergoing death in baptism, a crucifying of the works of the flesh—

"For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ (his death, his cutting off) have put on Christ.

"And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"

(Gal. 3:27-29).

In this process we move from the side of Mount Ebal, the mount of the curses. We take our station upon the side of Mount Gerizim, the mount of blessings.

Those who stand approved in the presence of the Son of Man will pass from the side of Ebal to the side of Gerizim. They will be born of the Spirit, the flesh will be cut off, they will become physically equal unto the angels, passing from cursed Adamic nature into the blessed angelic existence:

"When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

"O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

"But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"

(I Cor. 15:54-57).

— E.F.H.
