

SERMON XIV.

ON THE DEDICATION OF THE ALTAR BY THE
PRINCES OF ISRAEL.

NUMBERS vii. 10, 11.

“ And the princes offered for dedicating of the altar, in the day that it was anointed; even the princes offered their offering before the altar. And the Lord said unto Moses, they shall offer their offering, each prince on his day, for the dedicating of the altar.

IN the first chapter of this book, we are informed, that on the first day of the second month, the Lord provided for the Israelites to pitch their camps, as on the first day of the first month, they had begun to erect the tabernacle. The people are numbered from twenty years old, and upwards; and their number amounted to six hundred thousand, and three thousand, and five hundred and fifty, Numb. i. 46. Of all which number, only two men entered the land of Canaan, viz. Caleb and Joshua.

The levites are not reckoned in this sum, and accordingly fall not under the same curse with the others, of not entering into the land of promise.

Not one impotent or sickly person, was found in all the congregation of Israel : so good was the Lord unto them.

The Lord gave commandment also concerning their encampment, in what manner they should pitch. The tabernacle was to be the centre : that being placed in the middle, the levites pitched next unto it, in a quadrangular body, round about it, at a certain distance. The whole body of Israelites pitched at another distance about them, in the same form, and two thousand cubits distance from the tabernacle. Every side of the square was distinguished by its respective ensigns. Judah's ensign was a lion, one of the figures in the cherubim : Ephraim's ensign was a bullock, this was also a figure in the cherubim : a man was the ensign of Reuben : an eagle was the ensign of Dan : both cherubic emblems.

As the camps were cast into a four-square form, and had these four ensigns, all taken from the cherubim of glory ; so as they lay encamped, the tabernacle was in the midst, as Christ is in the midst of his church.

The sanctuary and its court, were in a long square, twice as long as they were broad. In

what form the camp of Israel was, the scripture doth not shew, save that it was round about the tabernacle. Ainsworth says, it is likely it was a square, and so many thousand tents could not be pitched in a little room. Josephus says, that between every tribe in the four quarters, there was a space, like a mart, or fair, to buy and sell, with artificers shops, as if it had been a city. The camp of Israel is said to be twelve miles long, and twelve miles broad.

As God's sanctuary was walled about with the twelve tribes of Israel, so the new Jerusalem hath a wall with twelve gates, and names written thereon, of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. And the wall hath twelve foundations, and in them, the names of the twelve apostles and the Lamb, Rev. xxi. 12.

As there were three tribes on every quarter, so the new Jerusalem hath three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west, Rev. xxi. 13. As these twelve tribes, had their fathers' name graven on twelve precious stones, on the breast plate of the high priest; so the foundations of the wall of the heavenly city, is of the like precious stones, Rev. xxi. 19. As between the sanctuary and the tribes of Israel, there were four companies of levites, to watch and guard the holy tabernacle; so between God's throne, and the four and twenty elders, who encompassed it, were four

living animals, full of eyes, and round them were four and twenty elders, who fell down and worshipped God: see Rev. iv. The description in the fourth chapter of Revelations of the gospel church state and worship, is evidently taken from the encampment of the Israelites round about the tabernacle in the wilderness.

The levites being taken instead of all the first-born of the children of Israel, they are numbered. The time when they should enter on their service, what their particular employments should be, and when they should cease from serving, is very expressly declared. The truly excellent and learned Ainsworth, hath an excellent observation respecting the dignity of Aaron: 'He was elder brother to Moses; he was by marriage, brother to Nasson, prince of Judah, for he had to wife, Elizabeth, his sister, Exodus vi. 23. he was joined with Moses in the government of Israel, Psalm lxxvii. 20. He had the honour to offer sacrifice for the whole church, 1 Chron. xxiii. 13. But Christ, our prophet, priest, and king, far excelleth him.'

In this chapter before me, an account is given, that when the tabernacle was set up, and anointed, and sanctified, the princes of the twelve tribes brought their presents, as voluntary offerings to the service of the Lord. The Holy Ghost, had doubtless, suggested to their minds, what would be necessary. And their

sacrifices were to honour the altar, and shew their part in the sacrifice of the holy and immaculate Lamb of God, who was the substance and anti-type both of the altar, sacrifices, sprinklings of blood, and all the rites and ceremonies performed in this instituted worship of God.

On what particular day the princes presented themselves to the dedication, is not easy to say. It was probably in the second month, after the people had been numbered, and properly disposed in their camps, round about the tabernacle.

On the first day of the first month of this year, the tabernacle was erected. Out of it the Lord spake to Moses; he, at the Lord's command, anointed the tabernacle, and Aaron, and consecrated him to his office of high priest, and his sons to the priesthood: seven days were engaged in their ordination; which being ended, the next day Aaron entered on his office, offered sacrifice for himself and the people, went into the holy place, and burnt incense on the golden altar, came out from thence, and with uplifted hands, blessed the people in the name of the Lord.

From this time the service of God was carried on successively day by day. On the first day of the second month, the Israelites were numbered. Orders were given for forming their camps, and how they were to be placed round

about the tabernacle. The Aaronites, Koathites, Gershonites, and Merarites, were also numbered, and their stations, offices, and work assigned them. Aaron and Moses were to pitch immediately before the court of God's sanctuary, on the east. The levites of Kohath on the south; the levites of Gershon on the west; the levites of Merari on the north side of the tabernacle; whilst the camps of Israel surrounded them.

On the twentieth day of this month, the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle, and the people journeyed from Sinai to the wilderness of Paran.

Now whether it was on the first month in which the tabernacle was set up, after seven days had been employed in the consecration of Aaron and his sons, on the tenth day of which month, the passover was celebrated; or in this second month, that the princes offered for the dedication of the altar, is not very clear, though it seems probable it was in this second month.

The sanctuary and the altar, were the principal things, and therefore they were anointed first: these sanctified the services, and all the oblations. Aaron and his sons were to minister in the sanctuary, and at the altar; therefore the one was anointed, the others had blood and oil sprinkled on their garments, to consecrate them to minister in the priest's office: and the princes as the representatives of the twelve tribes, bring

their offerings for the dedication of the altar, according to the order in which they lay encamped round about the altar. The offerings they brought, were six waggons and twelve oxen for the service of the sanctuary: these were given to the levites of Gershon and Merari: the waggons were of service when the tabernacle came to be taken down, to put the boards, bars, coverings, vails, &c. therein. And the oxen were of use to draw the waggons. These things were given by Moses to the Gershonites and Merarites, because it was their charge to take down and set up the tabernacle, as it was to be removed and pitched in the wilderness state the people were now in.

The altar which was now to be dedicated for the sacrifices of all Israel, at all times, and for all cases, the princes of the twelve tribes dedicated it with gifts and sacrifices of all sorts, and with very great solemnity, for twelve days. Hereby they testified their faith and joy in Christ, who was typified by the altar, by whom they were to draw nigh unto God.

In discoursing on the words before me, which I have selected for my text, and which read thus; " And the princes offered for the dedicating of the altar, in the day it was anointed, even the princes offered their offerings before the altar: and the Lord said unto Moses, they shall

offer their offerings, each prince on his day, for the dedicating of the altar." In opening and explaining which, I will aim to set forth the following particulars.

First. I will speak of the offerings of these princes, presented by them before the altar.

Secondly. The Lord's command concerning these, when they should be offered.

Thirdly. What we may understand, as shadowed forth, and represented hereby.

I am, first, to speak of the offerings presented by these princes before the altar. It may not be amiss to remind you of the solemnities with which the first and second month of this second year, after the Israelites were come forth out of the land of Egypt, were accompanied.

On the first day of the first month, the tabernacle was erected, the sacred furniture being placed in it, Jehovah, the essential Word, took up his dwelling therein, by the cloud of glory, which rested on that part of the tabernacle, stiled the most holy place, and in it he displayed his glory between the cherubic emblems, and spake with an articulate voice to Moses.

Soon after this, Aaron and his four eldest sons, were invested and consecrated to their office of priesthood. Aaron, and the tabernacle, with all its vessels, the altar of burnt-offering, the laver and its foot, were also anointed seven times, for seven days successively: and the sons

of Aaron sprinkled with blood and oil on their garments; and their and Aaron's right ears, thumbs, and toes, tipped with sacrificial blood, the seven days the ordination lasted. And sin, burnt, and consecration offerings, were offered on each of these days. And thus Aaron and his sons were fitted, qualified, and invested into their offices: and this being concluded on the seventh day, on the following, which was the eighth day, there was a glorious display of Jehovah's glory in the cloud, to all the congregation: and fire came out from the Lord, *i. e.* from the holy of holies, and consumed the sacrifices, which was a token of the divine favour and acceptance.

On the tenth day of this same month, the feast of the passover was celebrated, with all its rites and ceremonies; so that this first month had many signal and glorious seasons and solemnities.

On the first day of the second month, the people, at the command of the Lord, were numbered; after which they were cast into proper divisions, and orders were given how they should encamp round about the tabernacle.

The levites were also numbered, separated, and sanctified to the service of the Lord, by the laying on of the hands of the Israelites upon them, by the sprinkling of the water of purification on them, by sacrifices and washings.

After all these commands had been attended to, it seems, these princes, out of love to the service of the Lord, and in honor of his holy name and worship, presented themselves before the door of the tabernacle, with their presents. These were of two sorts: the one of waggons, and oxen to draw them, was for the service of the tabernacle; the other, of vessels of gold and silver, oxen, rams, lambs, and he-goats, with their meat-offerings and their drink-offerings, were for the service of the altar. The offering for the service of the tabernacle was, six covered waggons and twelve oxen: a waggon for two of the princes, viz. two of them joined in the expence, and each of them gave an ox. They brought, or caused these waggons and oxen to be brought before the tabernacle of the congregation. Moses, at the commandment of the Lord, received these presents, and properly applied them unto the use of the tabernacle of the congregation.

As the service of the Merarites consisted in having the charge of the boards of the tabernacle, the bars thereof, the pillars and sockets of it, and also the pillars, sockets, pins, and cords of the court, Moses gave unto them four waggons and eight oxen. And these waggons served to carry these things in when the people, at the Lord's command, removed from one place to another. Unto the Gershonites, their service being to take charge of the curtains of the taber-

nacle, with all the coverings, vails, and hangings, both of the tabernacle and its court, Moses gave two waggons and four oxen, to convey these things and keep them from the dust. Ithamer, the son of Aaron, was an overseer over both the Gershonites and the Merarites. He gave out these things unto them, and they were to look to their charge, and return them faithfully when the tent was again to be set up. Unto the Kohathites belonged the care of the ark, table, candlestick, and all those ministerial things which were to be borne upon the shoulders.

After the princes of the twelve tribes had voluntarily given the waggons and oxen to carry the tabernacle, and found it acceptable to God, they brought and offered most freely presents of silver chargers, bowls, spoons, and oxen, lambs, rams, he-goats, and meat and drink-offerings. The whole number of them, and their worth, were as follows: there were twelve chargers, or dishes, fit to carry part of the sacrifices in to the altar, these were of silver, each was an hundred and twenty shekels, so that each was in value, according to Brown, sixteen shillings and sixpence. The whole twelve silver bowls given by the princes, were to receive the blood of the sacrifices, which was to be sprinkled round about the altar, and carried within the vail. The silver bowl was in value about eight pounds. The twelve golden spoons were to carry the incense

in to the golden altar, each of them was worth eighteen pounds five shillings sterling, according to Brown, who computes the whole value of the silver chargers and bowls to be two hundred and seventy-three pounds fifteen shillings sterling; and the whole value of the golden spoons to be about one hundred and ninety-nine pounds sterling.

The number of animals for sacrifices were, twelve bullocks, twelve lambs, twelve rams, and twelve he-goats. These, in the sum total, were twenty-four bullocks, sixty rams, sixty he-goats, sixty lambs. This was the dedication of the altar by the princes of Israel. Mr. Romaine says, this record of the offering of the princes, of the number and weight of their vessels, declares that God is not unrighteous to forget the works and labour which proceed from love, which is shewn for his name sake. See Heb. vi. 10. I proceed,

Secondly, To shew the Lord's command concerning these princes, when their sacrifices should be offered.

If we look back to the tenth and eleventh verses of this chapter, we read thus; " And the princes offered for the dedicating of the altar, in the day that it was anointed, even the princes offered for their offering before the altar. And the Lord said unto Moses, they shall offer their offering, each prince on his day for the dedicating

of the altar:" this is my text. Here we have the Lord's command concerning these people; what they brought was pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God: and for the honour of his worship, he appoints each prince to offer on his day, and that in order. This was for the greater solemnity, and also to shew that each, and all the princes and tribes, had an equal right in the altar and sacrifices offered on it.

The captains or princes of each tribe, offer not according to their births, or as they are named in the first chapter of this book, but according to the order wherein God had set them round about the tabernacle: they began at the east quarter, proceeded to the south, then to the west, and ended at the north, according to the course of the sun.

Thus the Lord would have the same order kept for their oblation, which he had appointed for their situation, Numb. ii. and so likewise for their journies, Numb. x. xiv. xvii. The excellent Mr. Ainsworth says, God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.

The prince of the tribe of Judah offered first, to typify the honour of Christ, who was to be of his tribe, according to the flesh. The offerings were one silver charger, the weight thereof was an hundred and thirty shekels; one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them were full of fine

flour mingled with oil, for a meat-offering; one spoon of ten shekels of gold, full of incense; one young bullock, one ram, one lamb, of the first year, for a burnt-offering; one kid of the goats, for a sin-offering; and for a sacrifice of peace-offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs of the first year. Here were burnt-offerings, sin-offerings, peace-offerings, and meat and drink-offerings, for the dedicating the altar.

The burnt-offering was a figure of reconciliation, by the death of Christ. The sin-offering was a figure of the putting away of sin, by the sacrifice of Christ. The peace-offering shewed how Christ would make peace by the blood of his cross, and would thereby become our peace; and that our sacrifice of prayer and praise, should be offered up to God by faith in him, the glorious Mediator. The meat-offering was symbolical of our sanctification before God, in Christ. The drink-offering was expressive of our Lord's pouring out his soul unto death, and that his love to his church was stronger than death, and would be remembered by his church and people more than wine. The services repeated by each of the princes for twelve days together, shew how the Lord esteemed these religious services, which when done, it pleased the Lord to sum up the offerings of the princes, the number of vessels, and the weight of them, and

the number of all their services, to shew how acceptable this their service was unto him. He adds, as a testimony of his acceptance of these their services, "This was the dedication of the altar after that it was anointed."

This brings me to my third particular, what we may understand as shadowed forth, and represented hereby. The altar now dedicated, was a type of Christ; the oblations offered were memorials of his most precious blood-shedding, sacrifice, and death. The princes of the twelve tribes, shewed their faith, hope, and love, towards God in Christ Jesus; and also hereby testified the faith and hope of Israel, in the ever-blessed Messiah, the prince of peace. The apostle seems to say the very same, when giving in his testimony for Christ, before king Agrippa; he says, "And now I stand, and am judged for the hope of the promise, made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes instantly serving God day and night, hope to come."

These persons, by their offerings, professed their knowledge and faith in the Lord Jesus, declared hereby that they were seeking to enjoy communion with him, in all the benefits of his death: that they were ready to honor the Lord with their persons and substance, and with the first-fruits of all their increase; that they would willingly offer to the maintenance of the Lord's

continual and public service; and that they should account it their highest privilege to be accepted of him, and to be remembered by him, with the favour he bears to his beloved ones. As some of their oblations were peace-offerings, so they, with the priest, fed and feasted on some portions of these, and kept a feast with joy before the Lord, for his mercy towards his people. Solomon, in after time dedicated the house of God, 2 Chron. vii. 5. and kept the dedication of the altar seven days, 2 Chron. vii. 9. and at the jews return out of Babylon, they kept the dedication of the house of God with joy, and offered at the dedication of it, one hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, &c. Ezra vi. 16, 17.

Thus Christ, as solemnly consecrated for all the people of God, as the one altar, priest, and sacrifice, for his whole church, was set forth; and these persons by faith, received him as their propitiation, and fed on him as the one sacrifice for sin. Mr. Romaine says, 'The altar now dedicated, was a type of Christ; so the oblation of the princes of the twelve tribes, shewed the faith, hope, and love of Israel towards God in Christ.'

On the fourteenth day of this second month, a private passover was kept by some persons, who could not keep it on the fixed time in the first month. And on the twentieth day of this

second month, the cloud removing, the tabernacle was taken down, and the people went from mount Sinai, towards Canaan. The Lord gave the signal by taking up the cloud from off the tabernacle, and Moses prayed, " Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered, and let them that hate thee flee before thee." The priests with the trumpets blew the alarm, then Judah rose up, with Issachar and Zabulon, in which camp were one hundred and eighty-six thousand, and four hundred men of war, and they marched foremost; then followed the levites of Gershon and Merari, with six waggons, bearing the boards and coverings of the tabernacle. The trumpets sounded an alarm the second time, then Reuben, Simeon, and Gad, with their army of one hundred and fifty-one thousand four hundred and fifty fighting men, rose up and followed the tabernacle. After them went the levites, the sons of Kohath, in the midst of the twelve tribes, bearing on their shoulders, the ark, candlestick, table, altar, and other holy things. At the sound of the trumpet's third alarm, the standard of Ephraim rose, under which were of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, one hundred thousand and eight thousand, and an hundred men of war, and these followed the sanctuary. The psalmist hath reference to this when he prays thus, " Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up thy strength, and come and save us."

Psalm viii. 2. When the trumpets sounded the fourth alarm, the standard of Dan arose, in whose camp were one hundred and fifty-seven thousand and six hundred fighting men of Asher and Naphtali, who not guarding the tabernacle had charge of gathering all, and looking to the feeble, that nothing should be lost or left behind. Thus the sanctuary was in the midst, in the most safe and honorable place. The largest camp was before, the next in greatness went hindmost, to resist all enemies; but the Lord himself went before them, and he, as the God of Israel, was their rereward. He marched before his people in the wilderness, and the earth quaked, the heavens dropped, and he confirmed his inheritance when it was weary.

May the Lord bless what I have here laid before you. Amen.