

THE MOSQUE OF OMAR.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE place where the Mosque of Omar now stands is commonly considered as the holy place of the temple of Solomon, for mankind is in the habit of preserving local traditions faithfully, and we may feel certain that Omar built his mosque on the site regarded with awe by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The Christians would not build a church on the spot because they believed that the destruction of the temple had taken place according to the decree of divine providence, and it was considered as un-Christian to redeem the ruins from their desolation. Omar's structure, however, is very unlike other Mohammedan mosques. It is not a place of worship where faithful Mussulmans might gather for prayer, but is simply a rotunda covering a rough rock, and it is this rock which is the holy spot of the temple.

Here, we must assume, was the threshing-floor of Araunah,* the Jebusite, from whom David bought the ground because it had become holy to him on account of the theophany—the divine vision—that had been granted him. We must remember that David had offended Yahveh by numbering the people, and as a punishment Israel was visited by a plague. The story is told in 2 Sam. xxiv. 10-25, and reads as follows:

“And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.

“For when David was up in the morning, the word of the Lord came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, Go and say unto David, Thus saith the Lord, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee.

* אַרְנַח



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“So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days’ pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me.

“And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man.

“So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men.

“And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the Lord was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite.

“And David spake unto the Lord when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father’s house.

“And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite.

“And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded.

“And Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him: and Araunah went out, and bowed himself before the king on his face upon the ground.

“And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To buy the threshingfloor of thee, to build an altar unto the Lord, that the plague may be stayed from the people.

“And Araunah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood.

“All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king. And Araunah said unto the king, The Lord thy God accept thee.

“And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

“And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.”

The story is told twice in the Bible; the other version is found in 1 Chron. xxi and contains a few later additions and ornaments. The vision especially is described very dramatically in these words:

“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.”

It appears that the threshingfloor or Araunah which had thus become holy to the people has remained untouched by human hands throughout the ages down to the present day. It is most probable that it constituted the Holy of Holies in the Solomonic temple and also in its successor, the temple of Herod. After the destruction of the latter by Titus in 70 A. D. the place was marked by ruins, and the pious Moslem restored its pristine sanctity by erecting there a beautiful mosque built in Byzantine style. We can now understand that this graceful dome is in itself not a temple but simply serves as a covering for the protection of the holy place.