

Mahanim — Barzillai, Chimham, the Basket of Firstfruits, and One Place for God's Name

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2 Samuel 19 — Barzillai and Chimham: Longing for the Blessor

The Lord Jesus is still in the place of rejection — the rightful king of Israel and of this world, still disowned by the many. David was in that same place when Absalom's rebellion displaced him briefly from Jerusalem. Barzillai the Gileadite was faithful to David throughout that rejection. He ministered to David of his substance while David lay at Mahanaim. His name means iron of the Lord — firm, true, unwavering in loyalty to the king in his rejection.

When David was restored and invited Barzillai to come with him to Jerusalem, Barzillai declined. He was fourscore years old — he could no longer discern good and evil, could no longer taste food or hear the voice of singing men and singing women. Why should the king recompense him? He did not feel he had earned anything. He was humble about it. All belonged to David. But he sent his son Chimham — whose name means longed for. And it may be that the very name Barzillai gave his son reflects a longing of his heart: that Israel should have the blessor, not only the blessing; that they should have their rightful king.

Psalms 63:1 uses a word related to this longing: my flesh longeth for Thee. Barzillai longed for the blessor. Not for position or reward — he refused the king's reward — but that the king should have all. And so Chimham went over with David, and David would do for him whatever seemed good, and whatsoever Barzillai required. Someone has suggested David may have shared with him his

own kingly estate in Bethlehem. Certainly our Lord will share with us His kingly home — He will not do less for us than David did for Chimham.

A Sad Note — Ezra 2 and the Priest Who Took Barzillai's Name

There is a little shadow in connection with the name of Barzillai, not touching the man himself but his legacy. Ezra 2:61–63 records that among those who returned from captivity were the children of a priest who had taken a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called after their name. These sought their register among those reckoned by genealogy but were not found. They were put from the priesthood as polluted until there should stand up a priest with Urim and Thummim.

What had happened was this: a young priest had been drawn to a daughter of Barzillai — Barzillai was a very great man, a man of great substance, and it would be easy for a young man to be attracted to a young woman of that household. And this young priest gave up his priestly name, gave up his priestly identity, to take the name of Barzillai. And he lost his place in the priesthood. It did not come out until five hundred years later, when Israel was returned from Babylon in a weakened condition. At such times the Lord often brings out things that show the weakness. The young man had everything — except that he had given up the most important thing, his priestly standing, for the wealth and name of a great man of this world.

Deuteronomy 26 — The Basket of Firstfruits: The Happiest Priestly Function

Deuteronomy 26:1–4 describes perhaps the happiest function a priest in Israel could perform. An Israelite came to the priest with a basket of firstfruits and said: I profess this day unto the Lord thy God that I am come unto the country which the Lord sware unto our fathers for to give us. He was owning what God had done — brought him through the Red Sea, redeemed him, brought him through

the Jordan, given him the land. The priest took the basket and set it before the altar of the Lord — not a matter of sin or sacrifice or blood, but pure thanksgiving and worship.

The Lord has made us a kingdom of priests. There is no question about our genealogy, no need to wait for a priest with Urim and Thummim to verify our standing. If we know the Lord Jesus as Savior we are brought into the place of the kingdom of priests, with the privilege of going within the holiest of all and bringing that basket of firstfruits. The basket ought to come full — overflowing. And yet how often does our basket come with hardly anything in it, when the Lord has done far more for us than He did for Israel? He has brought us to the place where He has placed His name.

*Yea, the sparrow hath found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself,
even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. — Psalm 84:3*

Psalm 84 — A Chimham-Like Longing for the Courts of the Lord

Psalm 84:1–4 expresses a longing that is recognisably like Chimham's — a longing for the one place where the living God has put His name. The psalmist's soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord. His flesh crieth out for the living God. Not for a system, not for a form, not for machinery that turns and grinds — but for the living God Himself. And the little birds found it: the sparrow found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

The Lord said in the Gospels that five sparrows were sold for two farthings — which means when you bought two farthings' worth (two for a farthing, so four for two farthings), the fifth was thrown in for nothing, worth nothing by the world's reckoning. Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. And here, at the altars of the Lord of hosts, even the little worthless sparrow finds its house and the swallow finds her nest for her young. Blessed are they that dwell in thy

house: they will be still praising thee. A settled heart, a quietness of praise. That is what the longing of Psalm 84 leads to.

It was the one place where the person of the living God was to be found — the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place His name there. And that was what the longing was for: not the geographical location, not the system, but the person who was there. My King and my God. Like Thomas turning to the Lord Jesus and saying: my Lord and my God.

2 Kings 23 — The Idolatrous Priests and the Wrong Hill

Second Kings 23:5 records that Josiah put down the idolatrous priests — chemarim in Hebrew — whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah. Verse 9 gives the clue to who they were: the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, but they did eat of the unleavened bread among their brethren. They had brethren who ate the unleavened bread at Jerusalem — they were Aaronic priests, legitimate descendants of Aaron, the regular priests. But they were burning incense in the wrong places.

Burning incense was one of the most delightful priestly functions — no blood, no sacrifice for sin, just the fragrance ascending to God, like the basket of firstfruits. And these Aaronic priests were doing exactly that — but at the high places in the cities of Judah, on a nice hill somewhere other than the one place God had chosen. Josiah put a stop to it. Hezekiah before him had not done this. Josiah was thorough in his cleansing.

The ground of gathering — the place where faith lays hold upon the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of His assembly according to Matthew 18:20 — is the counterpart to that one place where God put His name in Israel. It is not a geographical place; it is a moral and spiritual reality. And the longing of the heart is for that one place, for the person who is there, for the living God, for the

Lord Jesus in the midst. To turn from that and find another hill in some other city of Judah — a nice hill, a comfortable hill, where the incense goes up pleasantly — is the sort of thing that Josiah would have stopped. Not because he was against worship, but because there was one place and one person. Thine are we, David. My King and my God.

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