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Jerusalem 12: 25-29 - Some Questions Answered

Michael J. Tolley

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More Works in Progress

From Sir Geoffrey Keynes: "The Blake Studies, much revised and greatly enlarged, is now printing at Oxford with 56 collotype plates by the Trianon Press. I am working on a revised edition of Mona Wilson's Life of Blake, expected this autumn. The Blake Trust will publish this year All Religions are One, for which I have written a brief introduction and description. Dover Publications Inc. have in hand a volume of 92 pencil drawings which I have introduced and edited. My Trianon Press edition of the Songs will be published as a paperback by Oxford in the autumn."

David Bindman is working on a book provisionally titled William Blake As an Artist, to be published by Phaidon in 1973.

Michael J. Tolley

A facsimile edition of ALL RELIGIONS are ONE has been published by the Trianon Press for the William Blake Trust. The reproduction is by color collotype with the occasional addition, by hand, of water-color washes through the stencils. To obtain a faithful reproduction, the entire text was silhouetted by hand on the collotype negatives. The facsimile is printed on pure rag. Price: £ 18 or \$43.20.

NOTES

1. JERUSALEM 12: 25-29 - SOME QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Michael J. Tolley
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What are those golden builders doing? where was
the burying place
Of soft Ethinthus? near Tyburns fatal Tree? is
that
Mild Zions hills most ancient promontory; near
mournful
Ever weeping Paddington? is that Calvary and
Golgotha?
Becoming a building of pity and compassion? ...

The first question I shall answer is implicit: where was "Mild Zions hills most ancient promontory"? I fancy that even a "king of quiz" would have some difficulty in rousing his faculties to answer this one offhand. I think most of us get as far as assuming that it must be a reference to "Calvary and

Golgotha", but find it impossible to work back from there, neither name being mentioned in the Old Testament (both are descriptive names only, meaning "a skull"). However, the student familiar with biblical typology cannot complain that the question is unfair: finding its solution, we discover one of Blake's characteristic "poems-within-a-reference". The answer is in the traditional interpretation of Genesis 22, the account of Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac. Briefly, this place of sacrifice, a mountain in "the land of Moriah", was identified with a hill in Sion (Jerusalem). The identification was common in Blake's time, Isaac naturally serving as a type of Christ crucified (though Swedenborg somewhat tendentiously found the whole story a type of Christ's temptations, Arcana Coelestia, par. 2766ff). Matthew Poole, for instance, whose commentary was first published in 1685 and republished throughout the eighteenth century, noted that in Moriah "particularly there were two eminent hills, or rather tops or parts of the same mountain; Sion where David's palace was: and Moriah, where the temple was built". Poole's qualification suggests that Blake's word "promontory" was chosen with care (Robert Young, in his Analytical Concordance, notes that "There is no sanction for the expression 'Mount Calvary' for it is only 18 feet high"). Various references could be cited, but it is sufficient to quote one of approximately the right date for Jerusalem, the Christian's Complete Family Bible, Liverpool, 1809, which has notes by "several eminent divines" (this is a new and revised edition). On Genesis 22.2 is noted: "The word Moriah signifies God manifested, and was so called from God's appearing to Abraham. Upon this very mountain the temple of Solomon was afterwards built, and upon one part of it, namely, Mount Calvary, our blessed Saviour offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of mankind." Moriah was also translated as "Vision" (by Samuel Clark, for instance, in his Family Bible of 1760) and if Blake accepted this meaning, he would have noted an interesting regression from Moriah, the place of the Divine Vision, to Golgotha, the skull. One answer to the question, "What are those golden builders doing?" (in building Golgonooza), is clearly that they are changing Tyburn-Golgotha back into a place of vision, where divine pity intervenes to prevent human sacrifice. Golgonooza is also a version of the temple of Solomon: by referring to Moriah through such an oblique antonomasia, Blake manages to suggest that the progression, place of sacrifice to temple, is a type of the new Jerusalem that comes from Calvary and so of Golgonooza built near Tyburn and Paddington. (David Erdman has suggested that Blake's vision was prompted partly by the actual expansion of home building in 1811 and has given some cogent reasons for Blake's specification of "ever-weeping Paddington" in Blake: Prophet Against Empire, chapter 27, section 1.)

Although, in his recapitulation of this passage in Jerusalem 27:25ff, Blake avoids further reference to the intended sacrifice of Isaac, the plate is much concerned with human sacrifice and Abraham is mentioned twice in the prose address. Here Abraham is called a Druid, but a contemporary reference in A Des-

criptive Catalogue⁵ gives his more specific function: "Abraham was called to succeed the Druidical age, which began to turn allegoric and mental signification into corporeal command, whereby human sacrifice would have depopulated the earth". A similar movement, "From willing sacrifice of Self, to sacrifice of (miscall'd) Enemies/ For Atonement", is mentioned in Jerusalem 28:20-21 and in the following plate (in Keynes' arrangement), lines 1-4,

Then the Divine Vision like a silent Sun
appeared above
Albions dark rocks; setting behind the Gardens
of Kensington
On Tyburns River, in clouds of blood; where was
mild Zion Hills
Most ancient promontory, and in the Sun, a Human
Form appeared

The ensuing speech of "the Voice Divine" is partly concerned with Abraham's problem of obedience, for Albion "hath founded his reaction into a Law / Of Action, For Obedience to destroy the Contraries of Man" (14-15). A third, perhaps less pointed mention of "Zion Hills most ancient promontary" is also in a context of human sacrifice, Jerusalem 80:36.

My answer to the other big question in this passage, "where was the burying-place / Of soft Ethinthus?", perhaps asks more questions than it solves. This time the answer is in Genesis 23, recounting Abraham's purchase of a "burying place" (verses 4, 9 and 20) for his family, following the death of his wife Sarah. The association with the story of Abraham and Isaac is too close to be accidental, but I can see little value in pressing an identification of Ethinthus with Sarah. Probably the original coining of the name (which may have been pre-Europe, for all we know) had nothing to do with this passage, but it is curious that this burying-place belonged to the sons of Heth (it is not likely that "soft Ethinthus" is connected with the Hebrew, ethan, translated as "hard" once in A.V., Proverbs 13:15). The grave bought by Abraham was the "cave of the field of Machpelah" (verse 19), identified with Hebron, 22 miles south of Jerusalem (and so near to Tyburn only by association with Abraham at Moriah). Blake speaks of "the Caves of Machpelah" once, in Jerusalem 64:38, a cryptic passage. Exploring Blake's cave-grave imagery would take me too far afield here, but we should not miss the typological link with Joseph of Arimathea's grave where Jesus was buried. It is not Joseph but Los who, in FZ 106 and 110, hews the Sepulcher "in the rock / Of Eternity for himself" and his motive probably explains the significance Blake attached to Abraham's concern for a tomb; "he hewd it despairing of Life Eternal" (106:16). Thus to bury soft Ethinthus is to deny her a possibility of resurrection; Erdman notes that the accidental digging up of Tyburn bones in 1811 "recalled that after the Restoration the bodies of Cromwell, Ireton, and Bradshaw had been disinterred, hanged and beheaded, and then reburied here--another denial of the Resurrection."

However, the tomb of Jesus was the place of Christ's resurrection and Blake notes that, although the Western Gate fourfold of Golgonooza is "clos'd up till the last day", yet then "the graves shall yield their dead" (13:11). A possible parallel to the burial of Ethinthus is that of Ahania "in a secret cave" in FZ 121:38, which Paul Miner has related to Sarah's burial (William Blake Essays for S. Foster Damon, ed. Alvin H. Rosenfeld, Providence, 1969, p. 266).

Ethinthus remains a shadowy figure, but perhaps someone will be able to take these suggestions further. It is noteworthy that Ethinthus immediately precedes Moab in the list of the daughters of Los and Enitharmon (FZ 115:8), so being neatly contemporary with Sarah, for Moab was a son [sic] of Lot, Abraham's nephew (Genesis 19:37). (Moab is a daughter in Blake's list because of Numbers 25:1, as Damon has explained in William Blake, 1924 p. 388.)

* * * * *

2. William Blake and Mrs. Grundy: Suppression of Visions of the Daughters of Albion¹

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The fact that William Blake found customers for his Visions of the Daughters of Albion caused its dispersion and prevented the certain destruction of this heterodox work at the hands of Frederick Tatham.² But with prudish publishers controlling Victorian presses it still took a full century for the complete text of the poem to be printed, and its slow release is closely related to the publication history of other Blake material. In fact, the public had to wait over sixty years after Blake's death to view a substantial portion of his work in one collection and nearly a hundred years for a reliable text of the Blake corpus. Most Blake editions, beginning with J. J. Garth Wilkinson's 1839 edition of the Songs of Innocence and of Experience drew material from these two works as well as from the Poetical Sketches, the Pickering Manuscript, the Rossetti Manuscript, and Thel. William Michael Rossetti went a step further with the addition of Tiriel in his 1874 edition for Bell's Aldine Poets, but not until the Yeats-Ellis three-volume work of 1893, with its lithographic reproductions of many of the Illuminated Books, in addition to the first printed version of The Four Zoas, was most Blake material available. Visions itself had appeared earlier in a faulty lithographic facsimile of 1876, and in 1885 the "Blake Press at Edmonton," under William Muir, issued fifty copies of a color facsimile done from an original copy owned by Thomas Butts.