

# The Eternal Elements

by G.W. North

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*The sermon explores the principle of eternal sacrifice and its significance in the Bible, highlighting the importance of a broken spirit and contrite heart in God's presence.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 14:18

**Topics:** "Eternal Sacrifice", "The Role of the Altar"

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## Description

G.W. North explores the profound encounter between Abraham and Melchizedek, emphasizing the significance of Melchizedek as a high priest and the eternal elements of sacrifice represented by bread and wine. This meeting confirms Abraham's faith and understanding of God's redemptive plan, illustrating that true sacrifice is rooted in a broken spirit and contrite heart rather than mere ritual. North draws parallels to David, who also recognized the importance of the altar and sacrifice, ultimately leading to the establishment of the temple. The sermon culminates in the understanding that Jesus' ultimate sacrifice fulfills and transcends all previous offerings, making Him the perfect and complete offering for humanity. Through these narratives, North highlights the eternal principles of sacrifice and God's unwavering presence among His people.

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## Transcript

The patriarch was probably helped and confirmed in his beliefs by an incident which took place fairly early on in his pilgrimage. This event was one of the most notable experiences of his life, indeed of the whole Book. It happened one day when he was returning from a victorious battle over the world powers of the darkness of the age. Tired and battle-weary as he must have been, he was met by a couple of kings, one of whom was named MELCHIZEDEK -- whom Abraham immediately accepted as his own high priest. As far as we know the patriarch belonged to no religious order; he had built many altars but had never made one bodily sacrifice. Without a system of religion he had no priest and in his humility he made no pretence or attempt to be one. Whatever passed between him and Melchizedek, Abraham meekly recognised and accepted this man's claims and ministry. From him Abraham was to discover the truth of eternal sacrifice and true priesthood in the spirit of which he had already been moving for a long time.

This Melchizedek was then reigning on the earth as the priest of the most high God. Whether there were other priests of this order on the earth at that time we do not know. That other men with other priests served other gods is certain, but Abraham had nothing to do with them. He was great, but great as he was, Melchizedek was a greater and far more important person than he.

Seeming to appear from nowhere, Melchizedek approached Abraham and offered him bread and wine. No word passed between them; there was no temple, no tabernacle in evidence; he built no altar, slew no sacrifice, shed no blood, lighted no fire, burned no incense. There was no ceremony, Melchizedek came from God to the patriarch; he neither preached nor prophesied, neither did he catechise him or inform him of God's requirements for sacrifice; there was no knife in his hand. He did not reprove the man for his bloodless hands or fireless altars, Abraham neither needed nor deserved it; instead Melchizedek blessed him and gave him the now familiar tokens of a past sacrifice. He brought him nothing of man or man's labours, but the twin elements and age-abiding memorials of the sacrifice of God.

Abraham had been right, all along he had moved in the obedience of a little child, knowing nothing, attempting nothing, waiting to be shown. Just how much he understood or was told of these secrets of God, now so well known to us, we cannot guess, but our understanding is sufficiently enlightened to see that those symbols testified then, as now, that the great sacrifice had already been made. Redemption had already been achieved by God; even at that early hour of the world's history its day had long since dawned in eternity and by Melchizedek God displayed to Abraham the evidence of it. There never had been, nor was there then, any need for Abraham to make a blood sacrifice; the Lamb was slain by the Father from the foundation of the world.

Melchizedek's ministry to Abraham was absolutely confirmatory, a testimony to his faithfulness: Abraham's procedure at the altar had been quite correct throughout; what a confirmation! He could and did retain the altar, for that must for ever stand among men as the pointer to God and the skies; that for which it representatively stood was precious and eternal. Its chief function was to reveal the life-principle of God. All we understand by the cross was originally developed from that. Finally it was brought forth as from God on earth.

Eventually, because he had not forced animals upon the God Who had not forced them upon him, Abraham was led to Moriah, the place where he discovered the knowledge of God and true sacrifice. But for the time being we will reserve any attempt to assess and evaluate it; instead we will trace some further developments and outworkings of the altar theme in scripture.

DAVID, who was raised up of God in the fourteenth generation from Abraham, was taught much of God about sacrifice and offerings. Following in the footsteps of his father Abraham before him, though under completely different circumstances, he also was led of God to build an altar on Moriah. The importance of his action can scarcely be overemphasised for this was the place where Solomon his son later built the temple; perhaps he even placed the altar upon the exact spot. What an example of divine planning this is! God carefully marked the spot in Abraham, re-marked it in David and permanently fixed it by Solomon.

All of this shows that in God, long before the earthly temple and all that went on in it existed or could exist, the altar was and had to be. What an order and what an emphasis. The temple system included an altar for men, but long before that existed the altar paved the way for the temple.

It is true that David, like Abraham centuries before him, offered sacrifices on his altar. Both these men were commissioned by God, though at different times and for different reasons, to go and do so; but neither of them was under any delusions about them. When the command came, David, as Abraham before him, could do no other but obey; therefore he went to the mount and responded to God in the manner commanded him. It was absolutely necessary, but his heart-knowledge concerning the whole matter of sacrifice and offering is revealed in Psalms 40 and 51. He knew that God did not want those as

such, He neither had desire for them nor took pleasure in them upon an altar. He originally made animals and birds for His own and man's pleasure; He did not make them to be slaughtered.

God first allowed and afterwards ordered the sacrifice of living things, because only by having them slain and offered to Himself could He teach man the lessons and truth he needed to know. David seemed to understand this perfectly; he saw and said that God did not want sacrifice and offering as much as He wanted His will done on earth. 'The sacrifices of God' he said 'are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart O Lord thou wilt not despise'.

David knew that what was sacrificed and offered on the altar meant nothing to God and was of no avail to man unless his heart be pulverised into purity and his spirit broken from sin. The events which took place in his life leading up to Ornan's threshing-floor furnish evidence of this fact. When he built his altar and sacrificed there David was indeed a man of broken spirit and contrite heart, wanting only to be obedient before God. His sacrifices were only outward means and tokens of giving himself afresh to the Lord, who had been more merciful to him than he had right to expect. He had fallen and he did not try to hide it; undeservedly and mercifully enough he had not fallen out of the Lord's hands but into them and O how gracious he had found Him to be. David ascended Moriah, purchased the spot where the angel stayed his hand from slaughter and built his altar in a threshing-floor; he knew his need to be threshed by God. With deepest penitence he submitted to it; in the end the man is found to be pure wheat. As far as we may judge this episode marks the time of his final defection from the path of righteousness. It was a period of unspeakable tragedy, but the building of the altar marked his return to the paths of righteousness and his complete acceptance by God.

With inspired foresight David saw that this very spot was the place where the temple should be built. Therefore, with equally inspired zeal, from that time onward David devoted himself almost entirely to the task of preparation. Plans were drawn up and materials assembled for building an 'exceeding magnificent' house for God on the site of the threshing-floor in which the altar stood. With the direct intention of facilitating this, during his last days David made his son king and, soon after his father's death, in compliance with his father's wishes, Solomon built the temple with the materials which David had prepared.

All of this further points the lesson that God is not, nor can be, without sacrifice; it is not only a principle of eternal life, it is also a domestic necessity apart from which He cannot abide anywhere. Even if only temporarily, wherever He dwells there must be an altar to symbolise the spiritual sacrifice so vital to life and without which it cannot be.

Beside signifying this principle, to men of spiritual perception like David the other purpose of the altar was its functional means of offering visible sacrifices to God. In paradise there was no altar, nor could be, consequently God did not live there; He only visited the place in the cool of the day, for He cannot abide anywhere at any time apart from sacrifice.

We know that sacrifices for sin must always be made from the broken spirits and contrite hearts of the sinful men who offer them. Perhaps it was in fulfilment of this aspect of sacrifice that, before rising and going to hang broken-hearted on a cross at Golgotha, the Lord Jesus went to Gethsemane and did what He did and said what He said there. There is no aspect of sacrifice which the Lord did not fulfil; Gethsemane's awful, mysterious events seem most likely to furnish the proper testimonials to the brokenness of spirit which God required of Him on behalf of man. There had never been, nor is there now,

neither can there ever be sorrow like unto Jesus' sorrow. He did not only sorrow personally, that is to say because of the unwarrantable injustice and utter rejection He received from man, but also vicariously and representatively. In this capacity He sorrowed: (1) as penitentially for all convicted men who have been made aware of the heinousness of their sin, (2) profoundly as God for His creatures.

Beside this, He delighted also to do God's will and this pleasure swallowed up all the sorrows in joy. This made His spirit whole and healed His aching, breaking heart, so that He could gather all sacrifice into one and give His all as a great ascending offering to God. His sacrifice and death for sin was so perfect and all-inclusive that it ended all further need for outward physical or inward spiritual sacrifices for sin for ever. Jesus' sacrifice and offering as Man for men is as complete as it is comprehensive.

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