

Abraham's Altar

by Keith Malcomson

The sermon emphasizes the critical role of the altar in Abraham's life as a foundation for prayer, guidance, and spiritual growth.

Scripture: Genesis 12:7, Genesis 13:6, Genesis 13:10, Genesis 13:14, Romans 4:12, Romans 6:6, Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:9, 2 Peter 2:7

Topics: "Personal Consecration", "Prayer Life"

Description

Keith Malcomson preaches on the significance of the altar in the life of Abraham, emphasizing the importance of personal consecration, prayer, and obedience to God's call. The altar symbolizes a life of prayer and seeking after God, as seen in Abraham's journey of faith and separation from the world. Through Abraham's example, believers are encouraged to make decisions, face trials, and live a separated life guided by prayer and dependence on God.

Transcript

Genesis 12:7, "And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him."

In the written Scriptures we are told in Genesis 4:26 that "then began men to call upon the name of the LORD." This was some 240 years after the creation of Adam. Sin began to abound in the earth as the result of Adam's sin and fall. This was manifest as Cain gave vent to anger and murder and as a new generation arose to do evil. In response and reaction to this rise of sinfulness there came a spiritual movement--this new movement was marked by calling upon the name of the LORD. From this time forward every man and woman of God, as well as every spiritual movement, would be initiated and marked by prayer. In Genesis the altar became the symbol of this life of prayer in seeking after God and this is seen most clearly in Abraham, the father of the faith, who is set forth in Scripture as an example to follow (Rom 4:12).

THE ALTAR OF PERSONAL CONSECRATION

The Lord initiated a new work in the earth when He called Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees. This was a new beginning with a new vessel but the vessel must be moulded and made fit to fulfil the call. The Lord called him away from an idolatrous land and family; He commanded him to forsake his kindred and fathers house; He called him to follow Him by faith alone in obedience to His command. This call was a call to

forsake all and to travel to the land of Canaan. However we read that "Terah took Abram his son...and they went forth...from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there" (11:31). His father, Terah, took the lead in response to the call of God. They journeyed 1000 km up the Euphrates. They got closer to Canaan but finally stopped at Haran instead of travelling on to Canaan.

Terah represents Abram's old man--the old nature, Adamic nature, the old life. Paul writes in the New Testament, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom.6:6). Paul frequently talks of this "old man" in association with the old life or previous life which a genuine believer must presently put off (Eph.4:22-24; Col.3:9-10). When called, Abram did leave Ur but instead of leaving Terah--his old man--behind he not only brought him on the journey but allowed him to take up the lead: after all he was older, more experienced, knowledgeable and respected by all. Although the old man accompanied and led Abram a long distance in the call of God he finally led him to a half way house. It was partial obedience. Abram was stuck in Haran and only the death of Terah would free him from such. "...and Terah died in Haran" (11:32). The death of Terah marked the beginning of the onward journey of Abram and his life in Canaan (12:1; Acts 7:3-4). In Haran we never read of the Lord speaking to him until Terah died. Only in his death is the call renewed.

At the age of 75 years Abram entered the land of Canaan. "And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him" (12:7). This altar was built in response to the Lord appearing to him. To get to this place there must be a working out of the doctrinal truth of the death of the old man. This is realised in practical experience by a full-hearted response to the call of God. In this the Lord takes priority over thoughts, feelings, past experience and another thousand things from the old life. Now it is the Lord alone. This first altar in Abram's life reveals something of the truth concerning the raising up of the altar of prayer in the life of a believer. Obedience, consecration as well as personal visitations of the Lord always lead to a life of prayer. When the Lord meets us in a special way and makes promises to us in revealing His will such ground. You never forget those times of prayer when the heart responds to God in full consecration; full dedication; when for me to live is Christ alone. This is the heart and foundation of a life of prayer.

THE ALTAR IN HOME, CHURCH & GUIDANCE

A personal altar of prayer will affect and influence every area of life. Abram was a man of the altar. The altar was to mark his life and mould his life for the rest of his days. After building his first altar we are told that "he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel" (12:8). He was a man on the move--a pilgrim. This move was made while at an altar of prayer. Every decision; every move; every change should be made as a result of time spent at an altar of prayer. He moved to a mountain; an exalted place of communion and fellowship. This mountain lay east of Bethel. His life was being lived in the light of the coming of the Lord. One day soon the eastern sky will part and Christ will return. This awareness was in relation to Bethel--this name means House of God and speaks to us of the church, the body of Christ. It was here that he pitched his tent--this was his home; the dwelling place of his family. It was at this place of his pitched tent east of Bethel that we are told: "and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD" (12:8). Home-life, church-life and all guidance must be governed by an old fashioned altar of prayer.

"Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south" (12:9). His onward journey was led of the Lord; but all faith, every call, and the life of prayer must be tested. Your prayer life will assuredly face trials, troubles,

challenges and famines. Here is Abram in the land; in obedience; a man of the altar; a blessed man; but very soon a tested man. Don't think being in the will of God or living a life of prayer will keep you from troubles. Without being tested by troubles your prayer life will be shallow at best. Trials test the steal of a man and reveal to himself his present spiritual state. Prayer reveals dependence upon God.

We are next told that "there was a famine in the land" and that "the famine was grievous" (12:10). Here is a man who knows the truth of the altar; he knows the reality of prayer in past experience. But here is a man faced with a grievous famine; no food, no sustenance, no strength, no way to feed his family, kin or servants. At such a time a man will either fall in utter helplessness and hopelessness at the altar of prayer or else he will lean on his natural understanding. We are told "Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there." This was a decision that he made without prayer. It was logical, reasonable, and understandable; but it was a decision that took him out of the land. Any decision not made at an altar of prayer will take you away from God's house, away from the Word of God and out of the will of God. We will not enter into the full story of his time in Egypt--a type of reliance upon the world's system instead of God's provision--but sufficient to say he acted in unbelief that led to fear, then to lies and the disgrace of being rebuked and corrected by Pharaoh. After this sad but thankfully short sojourn in Egypt Abram returned to Canaan.

"And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD" (13:3-4). Faith had faltered in leaving the altar but now faith is restored in a return to this altar near Bethel. You will always have to return to the place you went wrong but more importantly it will be a return to the same old altar of prayer. Many lessons are learned in such failures but the greatest is the lesson of prayer. This altar must mark every step. It is critical in every decision; it is vital in every crisis; it reveals your spiritual state.

THE ALTAR & A SEPERATED LIFE

This return to the altar would preserve him in the next trial just ahead. He had learnt his lesson in Egypt--utter reliance upon God. He no longer had the same confidence in his flesh but he had certainly gained a greater confidence in abiding and dwelling in the place of prayer. Just ahead was a challenge, a crisis, a choice and a change. This old altar was back in place in his personal life, home-life and church-life. Sadly his young nephew had learnt none of these lessons although he had walked with Abram passing through the same places and circumstances yet his life was not marked by the altar.

Peter in the New Testament called Abraham's nephew "just Lot" meaning he was justified or made righteous through faith in God (II Pet.2:7). Both Abram and Lot picture and typify two believers on their way to heaven but one who is marked by the altar of prayer the other who makes decisions under the influence of the flesh. One gets there and leaves a glorious testimony behind him; the other gets there but only as by fire. Although these two men walked and travelled an awful long way together and although there seemed to be little difference between them for many years a distinct difference did eventually manifest and a separation took place which led to them going in different directions. Abraham faced this trial humbled, broken but living his life from the perspective of that altar. Two reasons they could not continue together: i) "their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together" (13:6). This was wealth, or so-called blessings, gained in Egypt. Lot had profited in his journey with Abram but had not learnt the lesson of making decisions at the altar. ii) The second reason was "strife between the herdmen" (13:7). Those that are spiritual and those that are carnal cannot long dwell together in peace. Only an altar of prayer can deal with such strife.

Abraham had no time for all the controversy, disputing, arguing, provocation and wrangling in the camp. Praying men never do. Abram wanted no strife. Abram was a peacemaker, a peaceable man; he wanted to part from Lot as friends and brothers; he called upon Lot to make a choice of which land he wanted. He left the choice to Lot. Abram's character revealed that he was free from anger, that he was not covetous, he was not a manipulator. He was a man of faith. He had confidence in God. Such situations and choices always reveal the character of a man. This was a man dwelling at the altar. He called for Lot to separate himself. "And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes..." (v14). God blessed this action of separation from Lot by enlarging his spiritual vision and increasing the extent of the promise. Abram then moved his tent to high ground at Hebron the place of covenant-fellowship.

Lot did not make his decision at an altar of prayer. We are told that "Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where..." and that "...Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan..." (v10-11). He made his choice by carnal means--his eyes. He saw benefits, it reminded him of Egypt, and he saw things he desired, things that appealed to his nature. But there were things he did not see. He did not see the consequences of his choice. He would soon be living in Sodom. He soon exchanged his tent for a house in the city. He did not see the sin of the Sodomites which would very soon pollute his whole family. He did not see the coming judgement.

The altar is critical to sanctification, consecration and separation. The altar will preserve you. A man with no altar will soon lose his tent, his testimony, his family and unless the Lord is very gracious to him he will lose his very soul. This is only a brief introductory look at the place of the altar in the life of Abraham and what its place should be in the life of every true believer in Christ.

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