

Altars of Patriarchs - 2 (Gen 12:8-13:4)

- Altars played a central role in the faith of Patriarchs. They were powerful spiritual landmarks in their spiritual journeys, and also direct link to the voice of God & promises of God ('connection between heaven & earth'). The patriarchs built altars to God wherever they went. (Contrast Lot)
 - Abraham built 4 altars. Isaac 1. Jacob 1. (Isaac & Jacob completed what Abraham started). You can see these altars as significant expression of their devotional life in each 'seasons of the spiritual journey'. So much spiritual lessons to draw from.
 - In Thailand Mission – so many 'household altars' ('idols'). *Physical reminder to spiritual world* – 'lightning rod' or 'portals to spiritual reality'! - 'welcome mats' to demons whose aim is to come inside the house from outside, then 'into their physical bodies' = best dwelling place! Greatest lightning rod = human spirit! They will accept 'pigs' but prefer human body the most! i.e. 'Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor 6:19; 3:16-17).
 - Altar is a place of worship & sacrifice'. A physical reminder, a focus point to spiritual world. For Christians we can liken to 'Consistent devotional/prayer life.' Time/space to give focus to 'spiritual life'. Spiritual life can thrive when it is given a 'focus'. *Practical questions*: (1) Does it have to be the same time?; (2) Does it need to be same space? Not the rule, but the consistency & quality are the keys. (more than just driving time to work in the car – to shut out the world & shut in with God & Word)
1. **Altar of Promise (Gen 12:6-7)** – specific link between Gen 12:1-3 promise to the land. Abraham's 1st response = build the altar (entry point) & 'claims' that land. Altar as 'promise converter' (Canaanites were in the land!) *Are we converting the 'promises of God' through prayer life?*
- a. Terebinth (sacred tree): 'oak tree?'; Shechem: 'shoulder'; Moreh: 'stretching/archer'. Abraham puts the 1st landmark of the 'spiritual ownership' of land there! i.e. God's ownership. 'Blessing & Curse' pronounced there! (Deut 11:26-30).
 - b. C.f. Rev 8:1-5 Golden altar 'before' the throne. 'Incense' = prayers of the saints. God claiming the land in 8:5ff. Also the golden altar before the ark of God. Connection to the throne is the 'altar' – 'God's voice from the altar (Rev 6:9-11; 9:13; 16:7).'
 - c. Importance of 'personal'; 'family'; 'church'; 'national' altars. We must put God's lordship over these areas – esp. over the family! We shouldn't just accept the state of backslidden children.
 - d. Compare Lot & Abraham (2 Peter 2:7-8). Lot's soul was 'vexed' or 'tormented', because he knew God, but could not break away from sinful influences. Notable difference is that patriarchs built altars, but Lot did not. '~spiritual anchors for the family'.

2. **Altar of Testing & Restoration (Gen 12:8-9)** –between Bethel ('House of God') & Ai ('Heap of Ruins') – neither in Bethel, nor in Ai, but in between. Abraham @cross roads! [Altar was supposed to be in 'Bethel' as 'strategic prophetic centre' (Gen 28:17; 35:1-15; Jud 20:26), not in Ai (Josh 7)]
- a. Abraham takes the wrong turn and goes off course to Egypt (Gen 12:10-20). Why? Severe famine in the land. 'Rain fall' vs 'Nile delta'. Hills & mountains vs Plain with river channels – i.e. Abraham chose for himself what is expedient to human eyes without seeking the Lord (1st mistake).
 - b. In Egypt Abraham almost 'sold his wife Sarah' to Pharaoh, which would have *aborted God's promise: No Sarah (matriarch), No Isaac!* But God intervenes and rescues & totally restores Abraham! So glad Abraham wasn't perfect! *Who doesn't make a wrong turn at some point in life? 'Thank God, When God called us, He factored in our stupidity!'*
 - c. With warts and all, Abraham continually built altars throughout his life! This is the one secret of the men & women of God. – i.e. In the times of 'testing' & 'personal failure', they never let go of their deep relationship with God. *They continue to journey with God & go even deeper out of failure & brokenness. Abraham returns to this same altar where he went off rail, and 'calls on the name of the Lord' as he has done before (Gen 13:4) = 'a sign of humility!'*
 - d. Abraham's return to 'first altar' = 'first place of devotion' → 'Return to first love'. – i.e. Altar of 'Bethel/Ai' was to Abraham the 'anchor point' of his spiritual journey. Lot had no such anchor. Once he takes the wrong turn he has nothing to come back to, hence drifts into oblivion. 'No altar, no anchor.' Do you have your 'first altar' to come back to?
 - e. Amazingly God restored 'everything' to Abraham! (Mercy & Grace). Sometimes we need be set free from the failure & shames of the past before we can press on into God's future! (Phil 3:13-14).
 - f. When we pass through times of testing and trouble, the 'altar of God' is the 'anchor of hope' like the horns of the altar! (Heb 6:13-20). Altar of devotion must be at the centre of every Christian life, and the voice of the Lord coming out of God's altar to guide us. (Rev 6:9-11; 9:13; 16:7).
 - g. *The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; He will thrust out the enemy from before you, and will say, "Destroy!" (Deut 33:27)*

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the significant promises you have received from the Lord? Are you converting them into realities through the life of prayers?
2. How is the 'altar' of God important to us during the 'times of testing'? What are the areas you believe God for the full restorations?
3. Read Matthew 26:39-40. Discuss the importance of praying one hour/day.