

Abraham - Part Four

by Charles E. Wigg

The Second Altar:

It was at Bethel that Abraham built his second altar, but here something is added which is a further comment on his spiritual growth. He did not just build the altar to Jehovah, but he called upon the name of Jehovah. There is now a two-way response, not only is Jehovah speaking to Abraham, but he is calling upon that wonderful, mysterious name of Jehovah, the name of relationship.

To use New Testament, (N.T.) language, he is growing in the "true knowledge of God". We should all covet this in our experience, not just to know about God, with a mere academic knowledge, but that we should know what it is to talk with Him, not just in formal prayer, but in intimate communion.

Bethel takes an increasingly important place in the book of Genesis from here on. It shows us the importance of the house of God, in all of God's ways. It is the centre of His purposes, and the place of His presence and His blessings.

There is a commonly held idea today, that the building where the people of God gather, is the house of God. But the clear teaching of the N.T. is that it is the believers who are the house of God. Hebrews 3; 6, tells us that **we** are the house of God. 1 Tim. 3; 15, tells us that the House of God is the Church, the believers, 1 Pet. 2; 4 & 5, tells us that we are built up a spiritual house. Eph. 2; 19 to 22, tells us again that we are fitly framed as a building, for a habitation of God through the Spirit.

We shall see when we come to chapter 13 of Genesis that Bethel, was the very centre of the blessing of God for Abraham. From that point he was to look northward, southward, eastward and westward, showing it to be the very centre from which Abraham would expand to enjoy the land that God promised to give to his descendants.

Decline:

Abraham did not remain very long at this mountaintop place; he journeyed towards the south. This is often so true of us also. How often in our experience, we may attend some special meetings, or come into the enjoyment of the blessing of God in a rich and wonderful way. But we soon slip back again into the old rut once more. How much happier we would be, how much more there would be for God's pleasure in our lives, if only we could maintain that spiritual elevation in our lives!

I journeying towards the south, Abraham did not immediately leave the inheritance, but he left the centre of God's will, and declined to a dry and barren experience, just as we often do. The Negev was just as much a part of the Promised Land as Bethel, but it was low lying, dry and barren. It was on the outer edge of the land promised to Abraham.

From ancient times, the Negev, the southland, never receives more than four inches, (100 MM), of rain in a whole year. There is little chance of producing a crop in such a place, nor is there much pasture for animals. Let us take a warning from this part of Abraham's experience!

Further decline:

From this place Abraham continued his departure, perhaps he thought things would get better further on. No doubt in the long journey to Canaan, he had passed through good country and bad, but as he kept on in

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the path of the will of God, things did improve. However he was now out of the path of God's will, and things did not get better.

No doubt Satan would be encouraging him to go on, out of the path of the will of God. Assuring him that all was well, that things would get better. Perhaps he saw a mirage that often occurs in such places. I have read how that in such desert places, often even seasoned travelers are lured to their death by the sight of shimmering waters, green hills, waving palms, even cities. The mirage is so real to the imagination that they have been lured on towards what they see only in their mind, only to perish in the desert sands. Again let us be warned, Satan can play tricks with our minds too, and he will make what our souls crave for seem to be so real, but all is a hallucination.

A point of no return:

Abraham had great herds of animals, and a very large number of servants, and he went so far, that in order to survive, he could not turn back, so he continued his journey until he came to the irrigated delta of the Nile, to Egypt. Here let us take another warning. If we lose our joy, if our spiritual life dries up, something is wrong. We need to turn back to what we have left, to retrace our steps, to get back into the centre of God's will, into the enjoyment of the fullness of His blessing.

Egypt is a type of this world, especially the world in its independence of God. Because of the abundant quantities of fresh water in the Nile River, they do not have to depend on the rain from heaven. In Ezekiel we hear them say, "My River is mine, and I have made it for myself." Ezek. 29; 3. But to go there Abraham had to go **down**. We read in Gen. chapter verse 10, that Abraham went down, into Egypt. The way down is the easy way, especially in times of difficulty. The Hebrew word for to go down (Yarad), means to descend, to decline, to march down, or to sink down, all of which we should avoid.

Abraham loses his confidence:

The first thing that Abraham lost as a result of this decline, was his confidence, his assurance. What a warning this is again to us. He was Sarah to be a threat to his safety, instead of the great asset that she had been all their married life. She was a very beautiful woman, he was afraid that these people who were governed by their lust would murder him, so that they could take her for themselves. He was afraid of losing his life, so he took steps to save it, to save himself. In so doing, he encouraged Sarah to tell a half-truth, and thereby exposed her to great moral danger.

This failure shows us the weakness of the principle of unbelief. What Paul calls "weak and beggarly elements", in Gal. 4; 9. Before he could be slain, God had to prove Himself to be a liar, and to be unable to fulfill the promise that He had made. For He promised to Abraham a son, through whom the whole human family would be blessed.

Unbelief made this prince of God into a coward; made him willing to sacrifice his faithful, beautiful wife on the altar of his own self-preservation. What a shame!

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The Faithfulness of God:

But though Abraham failed, yet God did not fail; what a comfort to know that He is greater than all our failures. There is a lovely verse in 2 Tim. 2; 13, which says, If we are unfaithful, yet He abides faithful: for He cannot deny Himself. (J.N.D. trans).

Sarah was taken into Pharaoh's harem, but God protected her. Pharaoh treated Abraham well because of her, but God plagued him and his house because of her. So that not only did Abraham dishonour God, and himself by exposing Sarah to this great moral danger, but he brought trouble and judgment on others also. Such is the danger of telling only half of the truth. Let us be warned!

Sent away in disgrace:

Pharaoh called Abraham, and reproved him for not telling the whole truth; what a shame that was. Once the truth was known, the Egyptians and their Ruler, did not want Abraham to remain there any longer, but sent them away. If we boldly confess the truth as to our loyalty to Christ, and our relationship to other believers, the world will not want us either.

There will be a place for us and a welcome, if the world thinks that it can gain from us by our presence, but if we are faithful, to Christ, and tell the whole truth, then we will be rejected, just as He was.

Satan's hidden agenda:

Behind Abraham's shameful lapse, was Satan's cunning plan, his hidden strategy: He had heard God promise a son to Abraham, through whom salvation would come to the lost, and blessing to all the families of the earth. Satan knew, that if Sarah was defiled by Pharaoh, then she could no longer be the mother of the promised seed; thus the plan of God would be foiled, and mankind doomed to a lost eternity.

We seldom realize how much may hang upon a seemingly simple failure. How it behooves us to be careful.

The upward way:

The way of recovery is always very difficult, but it is the only way. We read in chapter 13; 1, that Abraham went up out of Egypt. The way down is always the easy way, but it leads to disaster and loss. The way back is always difficult and calls for persistence and dedication.

Abraham was recovered, by the grace of God, but he took back with him from Egypt menservants and maidservants, who were given to him by the Egyptians. One of these was Hagar, who later became a tool in the hands of Satan; again, because of unbelief.