

Abraham's life of faith 12-13

12. Faith was sustained by worship and consecration

• Building altars
for God

• Places of
sacrifice

• Places of
revelation

• Places of
consecration

• An expression
of his conviction

13. Faith creates pilgrimage

12. **Faith was sustained by worship and consecration.** In Abram's story we find him continually building altars for God. The first was at Shechem ^{□1}, then he built another between Bethel and Ai ^{□2}. Then he built a third altar at Hebron ^{□3}. He was following the example of Noah who had also built an altar as soon as he was released from the ark ^{□4}. Later on he would build one also at Moriah ^{□5}. Isaac built an altar at Beersheba ^{□6}, and Jacob would build a second altar at Shechem ^{□7} and one at Bethel ^{□8}.

An altar was a place where a sacrifice was offered. Abram intended to use these places for times when he would offer sacrifices to God. He was continuing what had been begun by Abel. Abel pioneered the way of worshipping God by means of animal-sacrifice. The idea came from what God had done according to Genesis 3:24. God had killed an animal and covered the nakedness of Adam and Eve. By the death of an animal came a covering of their shame. Abel followed this hint from God. The death of an animal served as a sign that sin should be punished. The animal dies for the sins of the person offering the sacrifice. God accepted animal-sacrifice before Jesus came. The animal-sacrifice is a picture of what God will do through Jesus. The altars were places of faith in a substitutionary sacrifice. They were also places of prayer. Abram intended to have special times when he would seek God. We are to pray daily, but it is also good to have special times of prayer and days of prayer.

The altars were places of revelation. Often as Abram trusted in God's sacrifice and looked for the presence of God in his life, God would speak to him. Then the altar would become a place of revelation.

The altars were places of consecration. The offering of the animal expressed the thought that a substitute was needed because the offerer was conscious of his imperfections. Yet it also expressed the desire that he himself should be wholly dedicated to God, 'burnt up' in the service of God.

By building these altars, Abram was expressing his conviction that the land would one day specially belong to God. He was turning the land into a place of worship already! And it expressed his intention to live by continued worship and consecration to God. Faith is not a dry, barren intellectualism. It is a matter of meeting God!

13. **Faith creates pilgrimage.** Abram had to keep travelling. He still needed further clarification as to precisely which parts of the land were to come to his seed. Explanation will come ^{□1} but at the moment he is still exploring. He moves to the area east of Bethel, makes a camp between Bethel and Ai, and then builds a second altar ^{□2} for fellowship with God. Then he closes down the camp and starts off on his travels again, moving further south. Faith creates pilgrimage. Abram was not being allowed to totally settle down and call Shechem or Bethel or Ai or Hebron his 'home'.

□1 12:7
□2 12:8; see also
13:4
□3 13:18
□4 8:20
□5 22:9
□6 26:25
□7 33:20
□8 35:1,3, 7

□1 see 13:14-17
□2 12:8

• *Moving on in stages*

The Christian is a pilgrim, a traveller. It may not mean that we literally have to travel around, although that might be involved for some. But in spirit we are always to be pilgrims, travellers. We learn one lesson after another. We move on in the Lord's work from one stage to another.

• *No settling down*

Although Abram's first altar was in Shechem, an ancient town, the second one was not in a town but in the hills between two towns. Abram made his home a tent-encampment; it was a sign that he was not settling down with a large mansion in the nearest big town. He was a pilgrim and was not looking for great possessions in this world.

• *Temporary accommodation*

This is always to be the spirit and attitude with which we face life. God may give us a solid house! But in our attitudes we are always to have the spirit of a pilgrim, a nomad, a traveller. This world is not our home. Abram lived in something that was flimsy and temporary. We might well be given something better than that! But in spirit – and maybe quite literally – God calls us to know that we are here only temporarily.

• *Always ready for the next stage of God's calling*

It means that we must always be ready for a new calling from God. God's calling upon our lives will have unity in it, yet God's purpose is for us to 'evolve' and grow and develop. Each stage prepares for the next stage. Yet at any one point we must be ready to be called to move on to something that we have not been used to in the past. We are pilgrims not settlers!

• *Ready for upheaval and new ways of working*

It means that we must always be ready for upheaval. We are not to get too traditional and stuck in our ways. If our work for God and our ways of ministering for God are 100% identical to what we were doing ten years ago or even five years ago it is likely that we are not moving on with God. If we continue to do identically the same thing 'as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be' – it is likely that we are not open to new workings of God in our lives. We are (at least in spirit) to be like a traveller in a tent, not like a monarch in a mansion. It means that we must accept that life is facing one new thing after another – until we go to heaven.



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