

Articles by Sam Thorpe

Sam Thorpe

All material used by permission of the author, as published on
plymouthbrethren.org.

Also online at <https://plymouthbrethren.org/author/399>

KEE Ministry Library · Faithful Men
kee-ministry-library.netlify.app

Altars of Genesis

Where did the worship of the True and Living God by man first begin. As Genesis 3:8 suggests, man may have worshipped God during those "garden walk" experiences; however, the first visible remnants of worship are collected around the "altars of the Patriarchs". There are ten in all, beginning with Abel's in Genesis 4:3-5 and continuing through to Jacob's second altar at Bethel found in Genesis 35:6-14. Internal to all the altars, is a beautiful study of the four altars of Abraham, Bethel being a special place of worship for Abraham and possibly later for his grandson Jacob. Abraham's fourth altar, on Mount Moriah, stands out above the rest as an OT pinnacle casting its shadow across John 19 and Hebrews 11.

As these altars of the Patriarchs are studied in detail, some common elements germane to the worship of God begin to connect as themes from altar to altar. The Bible student will notice the presence and voice of God; man calling unto God; and God and man in fellowship. The altar evolved to be the "meeting place" with God and fallen man, now cast from the glory of the Garden of Eden. Taking up the study of the "meeting places" with God and man in the OT, we can trace a progression from the altars of the Patriarchs, to the Tent of Meeting, the Tabernacle, and the Temple of the Nation of Israel. These "places of meeting" all bore a common name - "the house of God" (Gen. 28:16-22); the place where God's presence was experienced and revered.

The altars of Genesis present for us a model of the character of worship God expects to receive and the

fellowship He longs to have with His creatures. Our observation of the activities surrounding these altars may assist us in the offering of "spiritual sacrifices" well pleasing unto the same Lord God of heaven and earth within the "house of God" today. We find seven specific things true of these OT altars. 1) It is a place where God's presence, glory and voice is known. 2) It is a place where worship ascends back unto God. 3) It is a place where God's plan of redemption is portrayed. 4) It is a place where man finds God's forgiveness and acceptance. 5) It is a place where man submits in full obedience to God. 6) It is a place where man's faith in God's Word is tested. 7) It is a place where God's promises to man are confirmed. Oh that these things would characterize the "meeting places" of the NT churches of today.

As one would stop to pause at these patriarchal altars, there are some lessons we can learn. Abel's altar would remind us that there is a Divinely prescribed manner of approach to God. It is not by man's own design or the works of his flesh. It must speak of the work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, by whose blood we gain entrance before a Holy God. Noah's altar, after the flood, would remind us that we only offer to God that which is "clean". It is worshippers with "clean hands" and "pure hearts" that can ascend His holy hill of worship (Psm. 24:3-4). The altars of Abraham will show us that we worship a God who desires to be active in the affairs of our lives. He is directing our paths, redirecting and forgiving our selfish choices, instructing us in His ways and leading us into His blessings and promises, all the while testing our obedience to Him, and Him alone.

Are we men of the altar? The "men of the altar" in Genesis were men who knew the touch of God's hand in their life. After spending time around the altar of God, they were never the same. These patriarchs were 1) men of faith; their names are recorded in Hebrews 11 as such. They are 2) men of God; God Himself actually incorporated their names into His holy name as He explained His identity to Moses in Exod. 3:6; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were 3) men of action; Abel is mentioned three times in the NT as the first martyr for God. Noah was used to preserve the entire human race under the wrath of God by building the earth's first ship. Abraham received the unconditional promises of God, passing one of the toughest tests of faith ever given to a human being, and became the father of the nation of Israel. God only knows what is possible through those today who will come to the altar of God and give themselves first as worshippers.

Jacob, like his grandfather Abraham, had a streak of independence, which could get in the way of accomplishing God's will God's way. His grandfather had gone through the "formality of worship" as he called upon the Lord at Bethel, but his heart was filled with self, as his steps soon betrayed, fleeing to Egypt during a famine, rather than trusting God. God brought a humbled Abraham back to Bethel, the point at which he first strayed from God's will, and there he found God's forgiveness. Of the four altars Abraham built, Bethel was the only altar where Abraham did not hear the voice of God. It is sin that hinders our communications with God and causes us to have "ears that do not hear". Now Jacob is fleeing from home due to some independent actions of self, and in Gen. 28:11 comes upon a "certain

place". He uses the "stones of that place" for a shelter for the evening sleep. God "meets with him" in this place through a vision and he calls the place "the house of God". Jacob then takes these same discarded stones and erects an altar of memorial unto the Lord, and pouring out oil (unto God we believe) over the stones. When we come to verse 19 of the text, it is then that we find out this place is none other than Bethel, and the stones of Jacob's altar are likely the stones left by his grandfather who worshipped God in this very same place. Jacob, unlike his grandfather, knew the very presence of the Lord at Bethel, and heard the promises of the voice of God.

Oh that we might know the joy of seeing our children and grandchildren "meeting with God" in the "house of God" and hearing the "voice of God" partly because we had previously erected an altar, and as "men of the altar" had demonstrated a life and a passion of worship and service to the only wise God, our Heavenly Father.

The Humble Walk With God

But He giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up (James 4:6-10).

When taking up the subject of "pride" and

"humility" one finds great comfort in the way James approaches the subject. "But He giveth more grace." It is as if the message here from God's Spirit is: "But for the grace of God we would all be consumed in the pride of our fallen flesh." Pride comes naturally and is prolific. Humility is the product of God's grace in human flesh.

Christ is the greatest example of humility, as He laid aside His heavenly garments, and clothed Himself in human flesh, only to later lay aside His outer garment and gird Himself with the servant's towel (John 13:4,5). Ultimately, this pictures the laying aside of the outward expression of His Divine glory so that He might be made sin for us. He humbled Himself unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-11).

God not only resists the proud, He hates pride. Pride is sin and God hates sin, but especially the sin of pride (Ps. 101:5; Prov. 6:16,17; 8:13). Here are five reasons why this sin in particular is hated so by God:

1. It was the "original" sin committed by Lucifer which cast him down to earth.
2. It was the "sin of Eve" which ultimately brought the fall of the human race.
3. It is the "root sin" of most symptomatic sins committed today.
4. It is the most subtle and common sin found in believers.
5. It is the one sin which most sinners "stumble over" when faced with God's free gift of salvation by grace alone.

James presents a fivefold progression for the child of God who through God's grace desires humility of spirit. The progression is composed of key action verbs: submit, resist, draw nigh, cleanse, be afflicted. These words give us a course of action to bring our proud hearts to God-pleasing humility.

1. It must begin by submission. Here is the recognition of the Lordship of Christ and our role as "servants" whose wills are solely to do that of the Master's bidding. Satan will oppose this act of submission in your life to the Lord. He will shoot the fiery darts of "self-exaltation" into your mind. He will promote esteeming yourself, building up the self-esteem of the flesh.
2. To this we must resist until he flees.
3. By drawing nigh to God, we get the real view of ourselves, exposing our true hearts. We cry out like Isaiah of old "Woe is me" (Isa. 6:1-5).
4. Clean hands and pure hearts are the conditions for entering His presence (Ps. 24:3,4).

5. This position in God's presence should cause deep remorse and repentance like Job in "dust and ashes" and we should be afflicted over the sin in our lives (Job 42:1-6).

As we take our sin and ourselves seriously before God, we will begin to walk with God in humility of heart (Micah 6:6-8).

No matter where you are in the pathway of the Christian walk, pride can have a devastating impact on your service, worship, relationships, and your fellowship with God and one another. Like the simple game of Simon Says, we may have gained a small step forward in our walk with God, and experience a major set back when the sin of pride gains a foothold in our life. Pride and humility are opposites in constant contrast and struggle in our lives.