

Redemption by blood

We know that the firstborn of man and beast belonged to the Lord. Accordingly, the Lord required that every firstborn son was devoted to Him and redeemed by blood. Even after his failure, the Lord encouraged Cain that if he did well he would be 'accepted'. We learn from Leviticus that an 'acceptable' offering was defined by how it was presented. Abel did indeed offer an acceptable sacrifice by presenting a firstborn lamb. We ought to remember that there was no other purpose in killing a lamb at this time. The people did not eat meat until after Noah's flood. This lamb for the burnt offering represented the life of Abel wholly given. It was presented acceptably to God with a willing heart.

Alternatively, Cain brought an offering from the fruit of the ground, that is, from the fruit of his work and labour. We must immediately recall that everything from the ground was cursed when God judged Adam. Cain would have been well aware of this. Everything that was cursed needed to be redeemed by blood. From the beginning, it was apparent that redemption and remission of sin was only possible with the shedding of blood.

By presenting a burnt offering, Abel took up the role of king-priest to his house. The irony of Cain and Abel is quite apparent. In his failure to offer a blood sacrifice, and with the consequent anger in his heart, Cain shed the blood of Abel. Abel became the first martyr and, to this day, his blood still speaks. Like the blood of all the saints, it speaks and bears witness of the very heart of God who gives and seeks offering.

References:

Ex 13:1-2 Heb 11:4
Gen 4:4, 7
Lev 22:17-25

Further Study

Gen 4

Daily Psalm

Psalm 138

Men of altars

When we consider Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who were the fathers of Israel, we note that they were all 'men of altars'. Each of these men built altars and offered sacrifices. The most prevalent of all their sacrifices were the burnt offerings. These offerings represented their lives wholly and continually given with a willing heart. They were truly men of altars.

We will suggest here that an altar is a context or administration for the receiving of offerings. When we consider the dying of Jesus, we are reminded immediately that He is the Lamb of God and the sin offering. He was offered on the altar of Yahweh. In human terms, He died on a Roman cross. However, as the Father's Lamb, He died on the altar. In the book of Hebrews, Paul reminds us that 'we have an altar, from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat'. In the earliest days of the church, it is quite apparent that the twelve apostles established an altar amongst themselves. Without this altar there would have been no scope for the recently converted disciples to bring their offerings and lay them at the apostles' feet. When we consider the history of Israel and the commands of the Lord, no individual or household was permitted to establish an altar and make an offering within the confines of their own houses. The altar of the Lord was indeed the only altar in Israel and was found at the doorway of the tabernacle and later the temple. Anyone who offered on a different altar incurred the blood-guilt of the very offering which they presented. The sacrifice offered imputed cursing rather than blessing.

References:

Heb 13:10

Further Study

Heb 13

Daily Psalm

Psalm 139

I know Abraham

When we consider Abraham, we indeed observe a man of altars and offering. This is firstly evident by his obedience to the command of the Lord to go forth from his country and father's house. At Shechem, the Lord appeared to Abraham and promised to give the land to his descendants. Abraham responded by building an altar. The right and proper response to the promises of God is to build an altar and of course, to make offering. Without a heart for offering and obedience, it is unlikely that Abraham would have apprehended the promises of the Lord. Abraham is commended by the words of the Lord when He said, 'I know Abraham, that he will command (teach) his children after him'.

Abraham was indeed a man after God's own heart. In all ways, Abraham gave and offered. The account of Mt Moriah is a well known Bible story. If Abraham had not comprehended the scope of offering, he would not have found the faith to offer Isaac. He was willing to offer his son as a burnt offering upon the mountain of the Lord, in the very same place where David was later to build his altar. It may appear that David was disobeying the command of the Lord by building this altar apart from the tabernacle. However, he built in the very place that the temple would later be constructed. Every initiative within the will of God is established this way. This is also true in the New Testament where the church was established when the disciples brought their offerings and laid them at the apostles' feet.

References:

Gen 12:1, 4 2 Chron 3:1
Gen 18:19 Acts 4:35
Gen 22:2-3

Further Study

Gen 22

Daily Psalm

Psalm 140

The house of God

Abraham is reckoned as the father of faith, the father of all who believe. We must not assume that he was simply giving mental assent to the Lord's promises. Abraham's faith made him a man after God's own heart. He was always participating in the faith of the Son. Having received the promises, Abraham proceeded from Shechem to a place which would later be named 'Bethel' by his grandson, Jacob. Bethel means 'the house of God'.

Abraham built an altar at Bethel and called upon the name of the Lord. Both Abraham and Jacob had faith for the house of God. Even in our day, the house of the Lord will not be built unless we respond to His precious and magnificent promises by coming to an altar and bringing offerings. 'We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.' When the Lord appeared to Isaac in Beersheba, He did so as the 'God of Abraham'. His words were abundant and empowering. The Lord said to Isaac, 'Do not fear for I am with you. I will bless and multiply your descendants'. And like Abraham, Isaac built an altar and called upon the name of the Lord.

These fathers of faith responded to the word of the Lord with complete obedience. It was abundantly clear to them, that the name of the Lord was in the same place as the altar. Indeed, the will of God could not be fulfilled unless they called upon His name. The promise that He would 'bless and multiply' demonstrates the purpose and outcome of all offering. When we make offering, we are acknowledging that we have nothing of ourselves, but we are seeking the abundance of His house.

References:

Rom 4:11
Gen 12:6-9
Heb 13:10

Further Study

Gen 12:1-9

Daily Psalm

Psalm 141

The altars of Jacob

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob built altars and called upon the name of the Lord. Jacob built his first altar at Shechem. He returned in the faith of Abraham to the place where his forefather had met the Lord and received the promises. Sometime earlier, the Lord had confronted Jacob in a most remarkable way. In a vision, he looked up and beheld a ladder stretching between heaven and earth. The Lord stood at the top of this ladder and confirmed His promises to him. Upon awakening, Jacob declared this place to be the house of God and the gate of heaven. He took the stone that he had used as his pillow and poured oil upon it. He called the place 'Bethel' meaning 'the house of God'. In this place, Jacob committed to give the Lord a tithe of everything. This is the first account of the anointing oil being poured out. This oil is indeed the oil upon our heads, even as it was the oil upon King David's head. The oil allows the eyes of our heart to be enlightened.

Years later, the Lord again appeared to Jacob and directed him to return to Bethel and make an altar 'to the God who had previously appeared to you'. Jacob did indeed build an altar and he called the place 'El-Bethel'. The Lord again confirmed that his name should be Israel which means 'prince with God'. God Almighty promised to multiply him. Jacob again set up a pillar in Bethel and poured out a drink offering upon it. He also poured oil upon it. This is the first account of a drink offering in the Scriptures and symbolized Jacob's commitment to empty himself.

References:

Gen 28:12, 17, 19, 22
Gen 35:1, 10 Eph 1:18
2 Kings 9:6

Further Study

Gen 28

Daily Psalm

Psalm 142