

WEEK THREE

THE LINE OF LIFE 5 — THE LINE OF LIFE WITH ABRAHAM

WEEK 3—DAY 1 THE LINE OF LIFE IN GENESIS (5) A LIFE OF THE ALTAR AND THE TENT

Gen. 12:7 And Jehovah appeared to Abram and said, To your seed will I give this land. And there he built an altar to Jehovah who had appeared to him.

The life of a Christian is the life of the altar and the tent. The altar is toward God while the tent is toward the world. In His presence, God requires that His children have an altar and on the earth that they have a tent. An altar calls for a tent, and a tent in turn demands an altar. It is impossible to have an altar without a tent, and it is also impossible to have a tent without a return to the altar. The altar and the tent are interrelated; they cannot be separated.

THE LIFE OF THE ALTAR (1)

Genesis 12:7 says, “And Jehovah appeared to Abram and said, To your seed will I give this land. And there he built an altar to Jehovah who had appeared to him.” In this verse we see that the altar is based on God’s appearance. Where there is no divine appearance, there is no altar. No one can offer himself to God unless he has first met God. Unless God has appeared to a man, he cannot offer his all to God. Consecration is not the result of man’s exhortation or persuasion but of God’s revelation. No one can voluntarily offer up all he has on the altar if God has not first appeared to him. By nature, no one can offer himself to God. Even when a man does want to offer himself to God, he finds that he really has nothing to offer. Some have said, “I want to give my heart to the Lord, but my heart will not agree.” Man cannot come over to God’s side. However, when man meets God, consecration takes place spontaneously in his life. If you catch sight of God just once and touch God just once, you are no longer your own. God is Someone who cannot be touched lightly! Once a man touches God, he can no longer live for himself.

We need to realize that the power to offer oneself to God comes through His appearance; it comes from His revelation. Those who talk about consecration are not necessarily consecrated themselves. Not everyone who preaches consecration or understands the doctrine of consecration is a consecrated person. Only those who have seen God are consecrated persons. God appeared to Abraham, and the immediate issue was that Abraham built an altar to God. The Lord Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, and Paul immediately asked, “What shall I do, Lord?” (Acts 22:10).

WEEK 3—DAY 2 THE LINE OF LIFE IN GENESIS (5) A LIFE OF THE ALTAR AND THE TENT

Acts 22:10 And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said to me, Rise up and go into Damascus, and there it will be told to you concerning all the things which have been appointed to you to do.

Gen. 15:18 To your seed do I give this land.

THE LIFE OF THE ALTAR (2)

A turning point in our spiritual life does not come through our decision to do something for God; it does not come as a result of our resolving to do this or that for God. It comes when we see Him. When we meet God, a radical change takes place in our life. We can no longer do what we did in the past. When we meet God Himself, we have the power to deny ourselves. The matter of denying one’s self ceases to be optional when we have met God. His appearance makes a person unable to go on by himself; it forces him to not live by himself anymore. God’s appearance brings with it inexhaustible power. Such an appearance will alter the whole course of a person’s life. For a Christian, the power to live for God is based on his vision of God. Oh! It is not our decision to serve the Lord that enables us to serve Him. It is not our will to build an altar that produces an altar. An altar is built when God comes to a man.

Thank the Lord that He does not have to say anything when He appears. Yet many times, He chooses to say something when He appears. When God appeared to Abraham, He said to him, “To your seed do I give this land” (Gen. 15:18). God’s appearance brings us into a new inheritance. It brings the realization that the Holy Spirit has been given to us as an earnest of the inheritance which we shall later possess in fullness. The part that we have received today in the Holy Spirit will be ours in full in the future. When God’s plan is fulfilled, we will enter the full inheritance.

God appeared to Abraham, and Abraham built an altar. This altar was not for a sin offering but for a burnt offering. A sin offering is for redemption, while a burnt offering is an offering of ourselves to God. The altar here does not refer to the Lord Jesus’ vicarious death for us; it refers to the consecration of ourselves to God. It was the kind of altar spoken of in Romans 12:1 “I exhort you therefore, brothers, through the compassions of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service.” The mercy of God caused the Lord Jesus to die for us. The mercy of God provided the cross on which we died with Him and on which the devil was dealt with. By the mercy of God we have His life within, and by His mercy, He will bring us into glory. It is on the ground of His mercies that God beseeches us to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to Him.

**WEEK 3—DAY 3 THE LINE OF LIFE IN GENESIS (5)
A LIFE OF THE ALTAR AND THE TENT**

Acts 7:2 And he said, Men, brothers and fathers, listen. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran.

THE LIFE OF THE ALTAR (3)

In connection with the burnt offering, we should note that a person of ample resources may have offered a bullock, one with less resources may have offered a sheep, and one whose means were even more limited may have offered a turtledove or pigeon (Lev. 1:3, 10, 14). But whether one offered a bullock, a sheep, or a turtledove or pigeon, the offerer had to offer up the whole. One could not offer half a bullock or half a sheep. God wants everything whole; He does not want a half offering. He cannot accept anything less than utter consecration.

For what purpose was the burnt offering placed on the altar? It was to be wholly burned. Many of us think that we offer ourselves to God to do this or that for Him, whereas what He wants of us is a burning. He does not need a bullock to plow the field for Him; He wants the bullock to be burned on the altar. God is not after our work, but ourselves. He wants us to offer ourselves to Him and be burned for Him. The altar does not signify doing something for God but living for God. The altar does not mean having busy activities but having a living for God. No activity or work can replace the altar. The altar is a life that is totally for God. Unlike the sacrifice of the Old Testament, which was utterly burned in one act, the sacrifice of the New Testament, as depicted in Romans 12, is the presenting of our bodies as a living sacrifice. Daily we are consumed on the altar, yet daily we are living; we are ever living, yet ever consumed. This is the sacrifice of the New Testament.

God appeared to Abraham, and Abraham offered himself to God. Once a man sees God, he will offer himself up totally to God. It is impossible for a man to see God and yet be indifferent. The altar is present as soon as a person sees God. Once there is the taste of His grace, the result is the altar. Once a man sees God's mercy, he becomes a living sacrifice. When the Lord's light comes, he will say, "What shall I do, Lord?"

Abraham had not heard many doctrines about consecration, nor had he been urged by others to consecrate himself. But Abraham had seen God, and when he did, he immediately built an altar to God. Oh, brothers and sisters, consecration is a spontaneous thing. Anyone to whom God has manifested Himself cannot do anything other than live for Him. Once God appears to a person, he will live totally for God. So it was with Abraham, and so it has been with everyone who has met God throughout the two thousand years of church history.

**WEEK 3—DAY 4 THE LINE OF LIFE IN GENESIS (5)
A LIFE OF THE ALTAR AND THE TENT**

Gen. 12:8 And he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent.

THE LIFE OF THE TENT (1)

The altar has its issue in the tent. Genesis 12:8 says, "And he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent." From then on, Abraham lived in God's house—Bethel. From then on, he lived in a tent. Actually he lived in a tent before, but God did not mention it. Not until he had built the altar does the Word of God bring the tent into view.

What is a tent? A tent is something movable; it does not take root anywhere. Through the altar God deals with us; through the tent God deals with our possessions. At the altar Abraham offered up his all to God. Was he thereafter stripped of everything, even his clothing and belongings? No! Abraham still possessed cattle and sheep and many other things, but he had become a tent dweller. What was not consumed on the altar could only be kept in the tent. Here we see a principle. Everything we have should be placed on the altar. But there is still something left. These are the things that are for our own use. However, they are not ours, they are to be left in the tent. We have to remember that anything that has not passed the altar cannot even be in the tent. But not everything that has passed the altar is consumed. Many things are burned away by the fire and are gone. When we consecrate many things to God, He takes them and nothing is left behind. But God leaves some of the things offered on the altar for our own use. The things that have passed through the altar and are for our use can only be kept in the tent.

Abraham's life was a life of the altar. A day came when even his only begotten son was offered upon it. But what did God do with Isaac? He did not take him away. What you place on the altar, God accepts. He cannot allow you to live for yourself, for your own pleasure, or by your own strength. The altar claims your all, yet not everything that is on the altar is burned. Many things that are placed on the altar are like Isaac; God gives them back to you. Yet these things in your hand can no longer be regarded as your own; they can only be kept in the tent.

Some people ask, "If I give my all to God, do I have to sell all my possessions and dispose of all my money? If I consecrate myself to God, how many chairs and tables may I have in my home and how many garments in my wardrobe?" Some people are truly perplexed over such questions. But we need to remember that we have two lives. We have a life to live before God, and we also have a life to live in the world.

**WEEK 3—DAY 5 THE LINE OF LIFE IN GENESIS (5)
A LIFE OF THE ALTAR AND THE TENT**

Gen. 12:8 And he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to Jehovah.

THE LIFE OF THE TENT (2)

In our life before God everything must truly be on the altar, but for our life in the world we still have need of many material things. While we are living in the world, we need clothing, food, and a dwelling place. We ought to consecrate our all to God and live for Him alone; but if He says we may retain a certain thing, then we may retain it. Nevertheless, we must apply the principle of the tent to all the physical things that He permits us to retain, because they have been given back to us to meet our need in the world. If we do not need them, we should dispose of them. We may use them, but we must not be touched by them. We can have them or let them go; they can be given, and they can be taken away. This is the life of the tent.

May we learn this lesson. We dare not use anything that has not been placed on the altar, we may not take anything back from the altar, and what God gives back must be kept according to the principle of the tent.

THE SECOND ALTAR (1)

Genesis 12:8 says, “And he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to Jehovah.” This is Abraham’s second altar. The altar led to the tent, and then the tent led again to the altar. With the altar, nothing is ours any longer, and whatever is left from the altar is placed in the tent. Nothing can occupy our heart anymore; our conscience is at peace before God, and we can boldly say to Him, “I have not held back one thing from You.” In this way, the tent leads us back to the altar. If our possessions have taken root and we cannot drop them or move them anymore, we become bound by these things, and there can never be a second altar.

When we offer ourselves upon the altar and consecrate our all to God, He leaves certain things for our use; but we have no choice as to what we can keep in the tent and what we have to take out of the tent back to the altar. Everything must first pass the altar. Whatever God leaves for our use, we can put in the tent. But we must still inquire of God concerning all the objects in the tent; we can only keep those that God allows us to keep. We cannot decide to keep anything for ourselves.

**WEEK 3—DAY 6 THE LINE OF LIFE IN GENESIS (5)
A LIFE OF THE ALTAR AND THE TENT**

Gen. 13:18 And Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to Jehovah.

What has been placed in the tent may go to the altar again at any time. If at any time God says, “You do not need this thing,” we should relinquish it immediately. If we cling to it and say, “This is mine,” then in our heart we have forsaken the altar and are no longer consecrated. We cannot return to the second altar and say to God that our life is being lived for Him.

God demands that everything we have be placed on the altar and that we have placed what He has left for us in the tent. We can only have the second altar when everything is in the tent. The most precious experience is the experience of the second altar. It is easy for us to be stirred up, to become zealous, and to consecrate ourselves. But three or five years after this, we collect many things from the world again, and we cannot go back to the altar anymore. But it is very precious if we can always be tent dwellers and build a second altar. The problem is not with possessions. The problem is with how our consecration stands.

Abraham had his failures. In his history there was a forsaking of the altar and the tent; he went down to Egypt. But there was recovery. How did that recovery come about? ...Recovery is a matter of returning to the altar and the tent. Have any of you failed? Have any of you slipped or betrayed your cause? Have any of you gone down into Egypt, so that now you have your own demands, your own hopes, your own interests, and your own aspirations? If you are seeking the way of recovery, you have to come back to the altar and the tent. God’s Word shows us that Abraham’s recovery involved his return “to the place where his tent had been at the beginning... To the place of the altar.” Recovery is to return to the tent and to the altar.

What happened to Abraham after his recovery? Genesis 13:18 says, “And Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt...in Hebron, and there he built an altar to Jehovah.” Hebron is the place of fellowship with God; it is the place of eternal and continuous fellowship. Abraham dwelt in Hebron, and in Hebron he built another altar for God. If we want to be in fellowship with God, we can never forsake the altar. May He be gracious to us and cause us to see the importance of consecration so that we may live a life of the altar and the tent!

The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, Volume 37, Chapter 16, Living Stream Ministry, Anaheim, CA. Used by permission, all rights reserved.