

PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Newsletter of Lifestream Teaching Ministries

Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 KJV)

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The Altar of ED

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The Children of Israel left Egypt with a promise that God had given them the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. Following the Lord who appeared in the form of a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, they journeyed for 40 years to reach the Promised Land. When they got to the Jordan river to actually cross over into the Promised Land, an interesting thing happened. Some of them did not want to cross over into the Land of Promise!

Numbers 32:1-5 NASB

- (1) Now the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad had an exceedingly large number of livestock. So when they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, that it was indeed a place suitable for livestock,
- (2) the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben came and spoke to Moses and to Eleazar the priest and to the leaders of the congregation, saying,
- (3) "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo and Beon,
- (4) the land which the LORD conquered before the congregation of Israel, is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock."
- (5) They said, "If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession; do not take us across the Jordan."

Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh decided that the land of Gilead was the best for them and wanted to settle there and not cross over the Jordan to the Land that God has promised. This immediately created a problem.

Numbers 32:6-7 NASB

- (6) But Moses said to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Reuben, "Shall your brothers go to war while you yourselves sit here?"
- (7) "Now why are you discouraging the sons of Israel from crossing over into the land which the LORD has given them?"

At first, it looked like these tribes wanted to take the easy way and not have to fight. So, after

Moses told them how much this idea would anger the Lord, they said that they would build pens for their livestock and places for their wives and children but would then cross the Jordan and fight to help their brothers conquer the land and would not return to their families until the fighting was over. This is what they did.

Numbers 32:16-19 NASB

- (16) Then they came near to him and said, "We will build here sheepfolds for our livestock and cities for our little ones;
- (17) but we ourselves will be armed ready *to go* before the sons of Israel, until we have brought them to their place, while our little ones live in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land.
- (18) "We will not return to our homes until every one of the sons of Israel has possessed his inheritance.
- (19) "For we will not have an inheritance with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has fallen to us on this side of the Jordan toward the east."

I am surprised that the Lord actually allowed them to do this. To me, it was like thumbing their nose at the Lord's provision. They said that they would fight to help everyone else get what the Lord had promised them but they didn't want any of it because there could not possibly be any land in the promised provision as good as what they had found themselves in Gilead. Can you imagine even implying that to God?

However, doing this created further problems. The Tabernacle, Ark of the Covenant, the Altar and everything associated with it went with everyone else into the Promised Land. Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh were left without anything that showed that they worshipped Jehovah just like the rest of the Israelites.

Joshua 22:10 NASB

- (10) When they came to the region of the Jordan which is in the land of Canaan, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh built an altar there by the Jordan, a large altar in appearance.

Joshua 22:11 NASB

- (11) And the sons of Israel heard *it* said, "Behold, the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built an altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region of the Jordan, on the side *belonging to* the sons of Israel."

They built this altar in the frontier of the Jordan, apparently, just inside the Promised Land. Of course, the other tribes considered this a clear violation of the commands of God.

Joshua 22:16 NASB

- (16) "Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD, 'What is this unfaithful act which you have committed against the God of Israel, turning away from following the LORD this day, by building yourselves an altar, to rebel against the LORD this day?

Joshua 22:18-19 NASB

- (18) that you must turn away this day from following the LORD? If you rebel against the LORD today, He will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel tomorrow.
- (19) 'If, however, the land of your possession is unclean, then cross into the land of the possession of the LORD, where the LORD'S tabernacle stands, and take possession among us. Only do not rebel against the LORD, or rebel against us by building an altar for yourselves, besides the altar of the LORD our God.

Their reason for building the altar was that it would be a witness to the real one. They weren't going to use it for anything, just keep it as a testimony and a reminder to themselves and to the rest of the Hebrews that they actually worshipped the Lord, the God of Israel.

Joshua 22:24-28 NASB

- (24) "But truly we have done this out of concern, for a reason, saying, 'In time to come your sons may say to our sons, "What have you to do with the LORD, the God of Israel?"
- (25) "For the LORD has made the Jordan a border between us and you, *you* sons of Reuben and sons of Gad; you have no portion in the LORD." So your sons may make our sons stop fearing the LORD.'
- (26) "Therefore we said, 'Let us build an altar, not for burnt offering or for sacrifice;
- (27) rather it shall be a witness between us and you and between our generations after us, that we are to perform the service of the LORD before Him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices and with our peace offerings, so that your sons will not say to our sons in time to come, "You have no portion in the LORD.'"
- (28) "Therefore we said, 'It shall also come about if they say *this* to us or to our generations in time to come, then we shall say, "See the copy of the altar of the LORD which our fathers made, not for burnt offering or for sacrifice; rather it is a witness between us and you."

Because of this, they named the altar *ED*, which is Hebrew for *witness* or *testimony*.

Joshua 22:34 KJV

- (34) And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar *Ed*: for it *shall be* a witness between us that the LORD *is* God.

So, the altar of Ed was not the altar of God but was simply a copy—an impotent copy that could not legally be used for any spiritual function.

Today, we are still using copies of the altar of God. We build buildings dedicated to God and put an altar down in the front and call for people to come to the altar for forgiveness, prayer, blessing, etc., etc. But you can't legally use the copies for spiritual functions. The true altar of God is in the heavens and it has the blood of fresh sacrifice upon it—the blood of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 9:23-26 NASB

- (23) Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.
- (24) For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;
- (25) nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own.
- (26) Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Jesus became The Way for us to come back to God. Under the New Covenant, instead of a physical land, He gave us a spiritual land, which is a land of promises, which is the Kingdom of God. And, just like the children of Israel, there is a price to be paid to occupy the land.

Joshua 1:2-3 NASB

- (2) "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel.
- (3) "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses.

While they *legally* owned the land because God had given it, they had to walk on it to *experientially* possess it. To do this caused them to come into conflict with others who were occupying the land. This is also true of our land of promises—we *legally* have all of the promises of God. To appropriate or experience the promises of God we have to walk on them—possess them *experientially*. This brings us into conflict with our spiritual enemies who try to prevent us from occupying the land. That is why Jesus said:

Matthew 11:12 NASB

- (12) "**From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.**

Even though God has given us the Kingdom, we have to get violent with the flesh, the world, and our spiritual enemies in order to live in the Kingdom.

But, this sounds like too much work, so; instead, we have settled on the wrong side of Jordan. We found a good land that did not require anything of us. We have settled there and have neglected to occupy the Land of Promises (the New Testament Promised Land). But, we want everyone to know that we worship the Lord even though we are not living in His promised land, so, we build copies of the altar as a witness or testimony to remind us that there is a real thing somewhere “over there”, but, to occupy it is too much trouble; we like it where we are.

But, as for me and my house, we are not satisfied with anyplace that is short of that which the Lord promised. We subject ourselves to the King in order to be citizens of His Kingdom and ambassadors to the world. We submit ourselves to His Lordship to be obedient to His commandments. We allow Him to change us—conform us to His will, character, and conduct in order to become like Him. And, we are willing to get violent with anything that hinders the full expression of His Lordship in our lives.

Let us tear down the “altars of Ed”; they are worthless anyway. We don’t need a copy of an altar to witness to others that we belong to God. The world will know by our love for one another. We don’t need a copy of anything; because, we have the real thing!

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