



Genesis 12:4-9

A Tent and an Alter in the middle.

SUB-THOUGHT BREAKOUT

- **12:4–6 — Abram obeys and enters the land**
- Faith moves before it fully understands.
- **12:7–9 — Abram builds altars and calls on the LORD**
- Worship marks the land before possession does.

The Flow

- Genesis 12 begins with Abram — one man called out by God to become the covenant line through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed.
- Genesis 12:1–3 gave the call and the promise.
- Genesis 12:4–20 shows the first steps after the call.
- This matters because Abram is immediately shown as both obedient and flawed. Scripture does not present him as a polished hero. It shows him as a real man learning to walk by faith.

The Big Lesson

- The life of faith does not begin with perfect understanding. It begins with obedience.
- Abram heard the word of the LORD and moved. He left Haran. He entered Canaan. He built altars. He called on the name of the LORD.
- He lived in the middle.
- That is where the lesson gets real.
- Many people can follow God when the promise is fresh.
- The real test comes when obedience leads into pressure.
- Abram had enough faith to leave Haran, but lived between Bethel and Ai.

Abram, a little background.

- He was 75 at this time
- If you start the Earth at 1, Abram would have been born in the year 1948. (Anno Mundi = “year of the world”)
- Adam created = Year 0/1
- Flood occurs \approx AM 1656
- Arphaxad born 2 years after Flood = AM 1658
- Genealogies in Genesis 11 are then added forward
- Abram born \approx AM 1948
- Modern Israel reborn in 1948 AD

- AD means:
- *Anno Domini* = “Year of Our Lord”
- Was developed around AD 525 by a monk named Dionysius Exiguus.
- Many traditional chronologies:
- Christ arrives around AM 4000.
- then ~2000 years since Christ, thus making the Earth 6000ish years old.
- So, The BC working backwards would make creation 4004 BC

- If Jewish AM is @5786, then AM 7000 is about 1214 years away.
- If someone is counting toward AM 6000, then it is about 214 years away.
- Anyway, this would place Abram 25 years before Issac would be born, making Him 100 years old.

GENESIS 12:4-5

- **Departed / went** — הֵלַךְ — halakh
- Pronounced: hah-LAHK
Meaning: to walk, go, journey, conduct one's life
- This is more than geographical movement.
- Abram's "going" becomes a picture of a whole new walk. (SHEM)
- Later Jewish thought develops the idea of halakhah from this root — the way one walks or lives.
- I believe this is a result of the promise God gave him. He moved!
- A true example of faith.

To walk / go

- הלך halakh — “to walk / go”
- Ancient pictograph layer:
 - ה— Hey: behold, reveal, breath
 - ל— Lamed: staff, authority, shepherding, direction
 - כ/ך— Kaph: palm, hand, covering, open hand
- Picture idea:
Behold the authority that directs the hand.
- Applied meaning:
Abram’s walk is not random movement. His life is now being directed by the revealed authority of God.

- That means Abram's departure was not emotional impulse; it was submission to the voice of God.
- He leaves Haran without owning the land, without controlling the future, and without knowing all the details.
- This is where faith gets real because many people want certainty before obedience, but Abram shows us that covenant faith moves on God's word before it sees God's outcome.
- Remember this is while he is still Abram NOT Abraham!

HORIZONTAL PASSAGES / THEMATIC BIBLE CONNECTIONS

- Abram leaving Haran connects to Israel leaving Egypt.
- It connects to the disciples leaving their nets in Matthew 4:19–20.
- It connects to believers being called out of Babylon-like systems in Revelation 18:4.
- It connects to the Christian life as a walk of faith, not sight, in 2 Corinthians 5:7.

Canaan

- Canaan — כְּנַעַן — Kena'an
- Pronounced: keh-NAH-ahn
- Canaan is the promised land, but it is not empty land. It is occupied land. The promise exists in territory where opposition already lives.
- כְּנַעַן — **Kena'an** — **“Canaan”**
- כ — Kaph: hand, covering
- נ — Nun: seed, life, continuation
- ע — Ayin: eye, seeing, perception
- ך — Nun final: seed, continuation, inheritance line

GENESIS 12:6–9

- **Shekhem**
- Meaning: shoulder, ridge, burden-bearing place
- It is not random geography. It repeatedly becomes a place of:
 - covenant
 - decision
 - inheritance
 - division
 - worship
 - repentance
 - leadership transition
- It sits between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, making it a natural “decision valley” in Israel’s story.

Verse 7

- “To your descendants I will give this land.”
- Remember Abram is 75 and Sarai is barren!
- Still, Abram then builds an altar.
- What does an altar mean?
- An altar in the Bible is much more than a pile of stones or a religious object.

Altars

- מִזְבֵּחַ— *mizbeach* (miz-BAY-akh)
- It comes from the root:
- זָבַח— *zavach* (zaw-VAHKH)
- Meaning:
- to slaughter
- to sacrifice
- to offer up
- So an altar is literally:
- **“the place where something is offered.”**

Not just animals

- Pride is offered
- Old life is offered
- Self-rule is offered
- Rebellion is offered
- Worship is offered
- Thanksgiving is offered
- Life itself is offered to God
- Romans 12:1 later carries this forward:
- “present your bodies a (Alter) living sacrifice...”

Not the first Alter made

- Noah — Genesis 8:20
- First thing after leaving the ark Noah builds is
- not a house
- not a city
- not security system
- An altar.
- **Altars Were Memorials**
- An altar often marked:
- a divine encounter
- a promise
- a turning point
- a covenant moment

Altars also mean

- meeting with God
- worship
- sacrifice
- covenant
- surrender
- remembrance
- identity and ownership
- The first major altar pattern appears early in Genesis and continues all through Scripture.

As NT Christian what do we offer on the Altar?

- The Altar of Surrender
- The believer becomes:
- the sacrifice Romans 12:1
- the offering
- the worshipper
- This means:
- surrendering plans
- surrendering pride
- surrendering control
- surrendering identity built apart from God

The Altar of Prayer

- Altars were places of meeting with God.
- Today prayer becomes one of those “altar spaces.”
- Not empty repetition.
- But genuine communion.
- Start seeing your prayer life as an “Alter”, a meeting place with God.

The Altar of Repentance

- Something dies:
- excuses
- rebellion
- hidden sin
- false identity
- This is why repentance is painful sometimes.
- Altars always involved sacrifice.
- You can not have a RESURRECTION WITHOUT DEATH!

The Altar of Obedience

- Abram's altar was connected to movement.
- God said:
 - "Go."
- Abram obeyed.
- Then came the altar.
- One of the greatest altars believers build today is costly obedience.
- Examples:
 - forgiving someone who wounded you
 - refusing compromise in business
 - confessing hidden sin
 - staying faithful in marriage
 - speaking truth when it costs you
 - serving quietly without recognition
- Those are altar moments because something in self dies.

The Altar of Identity

- Altars in Genesis often marked:
- new direction
- covenant
- identity shift (A NEW SHEM!)
- Today believers are baptized. This is an ALTER moment!
- Galatians 2:20:
- “I have been crucified with Christ...”

The Altar of Worship and Thanksgiving

- Hebrews 13:15 says:
- “let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise...”
- You are correct. In his book *Real Worship: Playground, Battleground, or Holy Ground?*, Warren Wiersbe argues that true worship is not merely the music or the service on Sunday morning, but the total surrender of a believer's life to God.
- Worship as A Lifestyle

The Altar of Time and Attention

- One modern hidden truth:
whatever consistently receives:
- your focus
- affection
- sacrifice
- time
- emotional energy
- functions like an altar.
- “What is consuming my life?”
- Because something always sits on the throne.

The Cross Changes Everything

- Under the New Covenant:
Jesus Christ became the final sacrifice.
- So believers are not trying to earn salvation through altar activity.
- Instead:
- surrender flows FROM salvation
- obedience flows FROM relationship
- worship flows FROM grace

Ultimately

- An altar is ultimately:
- the place where my will meets God's will.

- "Will I obey?"
- "Will I trust?"
- "Will I surrender?"
- "Will I die to self here?"

So Shechem becomes

- A gateway between old identity and covenant identity based on God's promise to Abram.
- Later Joshua "Choose this day" takes place at this very spot as they reenter the promise land.
- Also Joseph is buried here. Joshua 24:32
- Joseph died in Egypt but believed God would bring Israel back to the land.
- His burial at Shechem represents:
 - promise fulfilled
 - faith completed
 - inheritance secured

BUT!

- Place of Division in the Kingdom
- 1 Kings 12
- After Solomon dies, Rehoboam goes to Shechem to be crowned king.
- Instead of humility, he answers harshly.
- The kingdom divides there:
 - northern kingdom
 - southern kingdom

So remember Shechem means shoulder

- A Place of Decision
- Over and over, Shechem asks:
 - Who will you serve?
 - What burden will you carry?
 - What kingdom are you building?
- Big Biblical Pattern
- The pattern of Shechem is:
 - Abram enters promise there
 - Israel hears covenant there
 - Joshua renews covenant there
 - Joseph is buried there
 - the kingdom divides there
- So spiritually, Shechem becomes:
 - A place where covenant identity is tested and revealed.

VS 8 Bethel

- **בֵּית-אֵל — Bethel — “House of God”**
- ב — Bet: house
 - י — Yod: hand, work, deed
 - ת — Tav: mark, covenant, sign
 - א — Aleph: strength, leader, God
 - ל — Lamed: authority, shepherd staff
- Picture idea:
The house marked by the hand of the strong God’s authority.

Ai

- אֵי — Ai — “heap of ruins”
- ע — Ayin: eye, seeing
- י — Yod: hand, work
- Picture idea:
The eye sees what the hand has made.
- Looking forward to Joshua 7 and 8
- **The First Defeat (Joshua 7):** Following the victory at Jericho, Israel attacked Ai with only 3,000 men, underestimating the city.
- They were repelled, with about 36 soldiers killed.
- This defeat was blamed on Achan, who took forbidden plunder from Jericho, causing God to temporarily withhold support.
- But I don't think that was the case!

The sin

- Before Jericho:
- Joshua sought the Lord.
- The people consecrated themselves.
- God gave exact instructions.
- Victory came supernaturally.
- Before Ai:
- no seeking
- no waiting
- confidence in self
- “Do not let all the people go up...” (Josh. 7:3)

- Jericho taught dependence.
Ai exposed self-confidence.
- So symbolically (“the eyes have seen what the hand has made”) Israel leaves miraculous dependence at Jericho and walks straight into “the heap.” (Ai)
- And that flows to Achan’s confession in Joshua 7:21:
 - “When I saw... I coveted... and took...”
- Ai becomes a picture of what happens when:
 - the eye moves ahead of obedience
 - success replaces dependence
 - hidden compromise enters the camp
 - people stop seeking the Lord because they think they already know what to do
- And notice something else most people miss!
Jericho’s walls fell outward.
But Ai exposed inward collapse.

- The greater danger was never the enemy outside. It was compromise inside the covenant people.
- There is also a strong modern church parallel here.
- A ministry, church, business, or believer can:
- win a major victory
- experience growth
- see God move powerfully
- ...and then quietly stop seeking Him because the method now feels familiar.

Between the two.

- Understand this, this is the region. The names of the towns would come later!
- Bethel before was called Luz
- This is a connection between CH 13 and CH 15
- Bethel represents:
 - worship
 - promise
 - communion with God
 - revelation
- Ai represents:
 - ruin
 - fleshly confidence
 - worldly systems
 - collapse

Abram pitches his tent between them and builds an altar.

- This is deeply symbolic.
- **Abram is living in the tension between:**
- faith and sight
- promise and destruction
- dependence and self-effort
- heaven's system and man's system
- And notice:
the altar (later we know as our lives) is assumed facing toward Bethel (the house of God)

How do we know?

- In Scripture:
- East is often connected with exile, wandering, judgment, or moving away from God
 - Adam and Eve driven east of Eden — Genesis 3:24
 - Cain went east — Genesis 4:16
 - Babel built in the east/plain of Shinar — Genesis 11:2
 - Lot later moves east toward Sodom — Genesis 13:11
- Westward movement often symbolizes approaching God's presence
 - The tabernacle entrance faced east, meaning worshipers moved westward toward God
 - The Holy of Holies was in the west end of the tabernacle

The important point part.

- He is geographically between two realities, but spiritually oriented toward God.
- That is a picture of the believer.
- We all live “between two worlds”:
 - the Kingdom of God
 - the fallen world system
- Abram does not build a house there, he pitched a tent and built an altar.
- Jesus says believers are:
 - “in the world”
 - but “not of the world”
- This body is a tent, our house is in heaven where Jesus went to prepare a place for us

Between the two becomes covenant territory.

A place of:

- decision
- surrender
- dependence
- identity formation
- There is another layer too:
Abram often stands between:
- old identity and promised identity
- barrenness and fruitfulness
- earth and heaven
- wandering and inheritance

That “middle place” is where transformation happens.

- Most believers hate the “between.”
But Scripture repeatedly shows God works there:
- Israel between Egypt and Canaan
- David between anointing and kingship
- disciples between cross and resurrection
- church between Pentecost and Christ’s return
- The “between place” is usually where:
 - faith is tested
 - altars are built
 - self dies
 - dependence grows

Abram begins with:

- the call
- the separation
- the promise
- God says:
- “Get out...”
- That is the beginning of identity change.
- But then Abram does not immediately arrive at fulfillment. He moves into the “between place.”

In the middle, where faith is formed.

- That is where Bethel and Ai become important.
- The journey goes:
- The call
- The separation
- The altar
- The middle
- The testing
- The deeper promise

The middle is where:

- old identity is dying
- new identity is not fully mature yet
- dependence is being learned
- altars are tested
- vision is clarified
- Next week we are going to see what happens next, Famine and testing.
- That is important.
- Immediately after entering the land of promise, pressure comes.
- That exposes whether Abram will:
 - remain at the altar
or
 - move by fear

Tin foil hat time!

- Ai = The eye sees what the hand has made.
- AI = English acronym for “Artificial Intelligence”
- Modern culture is increasingly trusting systems, technology, data, and artificial substitutes for wisdom, identity, and truth.
- That can become a modern “Ai” picture spiritually — human-built systems apart from God eventually becoming ruins.
- “Abram pitched between Bethel and Ai.
- Humanity still lives between the House of God and the ruins of self-made systems.”
- When man chooses Ai, he chooses “ruins”



Genesis 12:4-9

A Tent and an Alter in the middle.