



Building Spiritual Altars of God

Recently, in speaking with someone, I made the following statement, “We really need to build an altar here unto the Lord.” They turned and looked at the front area of the sanctuary where the pulpit was and where all the musical equipment was and then they turned and looked at me with a little bit of a puzzled look on their face. I immediately realized that they thought I was referring to building an actual physical structure of some sort to be placed on the platform. I assured them that I was not speaking about an actual physical structure but rather I was speaking in a spiritual sense of “building a spiritual altar unto the Lord” in that church. As I pondered on this little encounter, I began to realize that most of us within the Body of Christ have lost the concept of the “altars of God.”

Unfortunately, we have come to equate the concept of “altars” as that of being some kind of a table that is on a platform where priests or members of the clergy perform rituals in a liturgical manner. For many we immediately think “religion” or “ritualism” or we even go as far as saying “pharisaical.” Yes, it is true that for some, this is the case. However, as the saying goes, “We have thrown out the baby with the dirty bathwater.”

What I am referring to is the concept of what the altar was to truly represent and what it is to represent and be for us as believers in Christ and the Body of Christ, in general.

Throughout scripture, we see people of God “building altars.” Why did they do this? What was the motive or idea behind what they were doing? Simply speaking, the concept of “building an altar” was that the altar was built to establish a “meeting place” between God and man. It represented a “portal” that reached from heaven down to earth and back up again. The altars of old were not very “impressive.” They were basically made of stones that were placed on top of each other. The idea was that the person building the altar was setting aside a place to meet with God. The altar was built from material that God had made with His own hand (stone). The person would take what God had made (the stones) and simply placed them on top of each other. It was not to be very high. It was to be just a few stones. Upon the altar there would always be a sacrifice presented unto the Lord. Exodus 20: 24-26, expresses this concept and the reason why God wanted it this way - “An **altar of earth** thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. And if thou wilt make me an **altar of stone**, thou shalt **not build it of hewn stone**: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.”

One of the first “altars” we read about was not really mentioned as an “altar.” We read in Genesis 4:2-8, of the account of Cain and Abel. We are all very familiar with this account. They were to meet with God. It would seem fitting that each would have built an altar to offer their sacrifices as they met with Him. However, each had a very different idea of what would be pleasing to God. The main concept that I would like to point out for our discussion, is that here were two individuals bringing two different sacrifices/offerings unto God. God came to meet with them. One offering was acceptable to God and one was not. It is vital to understand that when we desire to “meet with God,” the attitude of heart should be to offer what is acceptable and pleasing to Him, not what we think should be pleasing and acceptable to Him.

The first actual mention of the term “altar” in the scriptures is of an altar “built” by Noah. Noah and his family were saved by God from the flood. After one year Noah is finally able to come out of the Ark. The first thing he does is build an altar. Read Genesis 8:20-22. This altar was an “altar of worship (sacrifices) and thanksgiving” recognizing that it was God who had delivered them from the flood. Noah’s altar brought forth a “**sweet savor**” unto the Lord and that place became a “portal of heaven.” It was an altar of worship and thanksgiving that blessed and delighted God’s heart so much that He spoke an eternal covenant that put into motion spiritual principles that are still in existence today and will be forever.

Next we read of Abram building an “altar of covenant” at a place called Bethel. It was there that we read in Genesis 12:7, 8 - *“And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there **built he an altar unto the LORD**, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west and Hai on the east: and there **he built an altar unto the LORD**, and **called upon the name of the LORD.**”* This altar became a “portal” into heaven. It marked the place, and still marks the place, of the eternal covenant between God, Abraham and Abraham’s seed. The inheritance of this covenant extends to every Born Again child of God, through Jesus, with even greater promises.

After Abram’s journey into Egypt we read that he returned to that same place of covenant, Bethel, where he first built an altar and met with God. Genesis 13: 1-4 states, *“And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Hai; Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram **called on the name of the LORD.**”* Abram knew this was a “portal” of Heaven because of the altar that he built previously. The altar obviously was still there. It was a special place where Abram “met with God.” Abram again “called on the name of the Lord” and God met with him.

We see that two generations later, Jacob when running from Esau, came upon this place called Bethel. He was tired and in great distress. He took “a stone” to rest his head upon. That night, Jacob had his vision of a “ladder” where angels were “ascending and descending from heaven.” What he saw was a vision of the “portal of heaven” that was established by His forefather Abram. Could the “stone” that he placed under his head to sleep on, possibly be one of the stones used by Abram to build his altar? The stone was a “point of contact.” When Jacob placed his head on the stone - the portal of heaven was opened to Him. We read that Jacob immediately arose and built an altar, again possibly using the same stones that his grandfather used. This altar became an “altar of worship and praise” Genesis 33:20 - *“And he **erected there an altar**, and called it **Elelohe-Israel.**”* Jacob built an altar to declare that “God is the mighty God of Israel” - Elelohe-Yisreal. Jacob whose name was changed to Israel was declaring that God is his and his descendant’s, “Mighty God.” God met Jacob at this altar in the “time of his distress” and encouraged him. This became the place where, even though Jacob did not know it at the time, his journey of being a covenant man of God was just beginning.

Later, as Jacob was returning from his “experiences” with Laban, God told him to go to Bethel and “make an altar.” God knew the significance of this place of the altar and desired to meet Jacob there. Remember, this is where Abraham built an altar and met with God, twice. Previously, God met with Jacob at this site of the altar and spoke to Jacob in his “day of distress.” He allowed Jacob to “see” the vision of the “ladder” (portal of heaven). It was there that Jacob rebuilt the altar of his grandfather. Jacob realized that at this altar he had a life changing encounter with his God. Now, at this juncture of Jacob’s life, God was delivering and setting Jacob free from the characteristics of the old lifestyle. Jacob heard God. He understood the significance of this place. He prepares himself and all those with him, including his family. When he arrives, he immediately builds “an altar of remembrance (memorial) and thanksgiving” calling this altar “Elbethel,” “The God of the House of God.” Genesis 35: 1-3, 7 - *“And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fled from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto **his household**, and to all that were with him, **Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments:** And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an **altar unto God**, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went... And he **built there an altar**, and called the place **Elbethel:** because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother.”*

I believe as we read these accounts of Abraham and Jacob that they speak something very clear and loud to us as believers today concerning another aspect of the importance of “altars.” We may be in a region, a city

or even a family where years ago, spiritual “altars” may have been built through intercession and worship that established “portals” into the Throne Room of God. Spiritual “wells” may have been dug to bring forth God’s fresh springs of Life to flow forth. However, after time those altars were allowed to be torn down and the wells were “filled in and plugged up” by the enemy and his strategies. The enemy understands these spiritual principles, probably more than we do. We need to not only build our own altars and dig our own wells but maybe we need to find out what and where the altars of those that have gone before us in our regions, cities or families were established and rebuild some of those altars as well as unplug some of those plugged up wells and reestablish what was already done. There may be portals into heaven already prepared and established. This is where “spiritual mapping” and doing a little research may need to apply.

As we progress through the scriptures we come to Mount Sinai where the Lord meets with Moses. Mount Sinai itself could be considered a “God appointed altar” and therefore a “portal” of heaven. After all it was “made of stone.” There, God met with Moses and brought him into the “Tabernacle” of Heaven. Moses was told by God to build an earthly Tabernacle for the Lord’s presence to dwell among His people. In this earthly Tabernacle, there would be pieces of furniture that were to be fashioned after the pattern of the items that Moses saw in the heavenly Tabernacle. For our discussion we will only review the altars found in the Tabernacle of Moses. The “altars” that Moses saw in the heavenly Tabernacle served as “patterns” for the altars found in the Tabernacle of Moses and ultimately, the Temple in Jerusalem.

Exodus 27:1-8 - The Brazen “altar of sacrifice.” As we know, this was the altar on which all of the animal offerings and sacrifices were placed and offered unto the Lord. It was a place of total and utter sacrifice signifying the burning and total consuming of everything of the sinful flesh. We must remember that there was to be absolutely nothing left but ashes. This meant even the bones had to be burned and turned to ashes. There was to be nothing left to distinguish anything of the sacrifice. As this sacrifice was being consumed by the fire of the altar, the smoke from the sacrifice would rise and become a “**sweet savor**” unto the Lord. It was “satisfying” to the Lord because it was an atoning gesture for sin. The sacrifice and total death of sinfulness and everything of the flesh is pleasing to the Lord.

Exodus 30:1-10 - The Golden “Altar of Incense.” This altar was the last article of furniture in the Holy Place. It was placed in front of the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. On this altar was placed a mixture of fragrances. The priest would take a coal from the Brazen Altar of sacrifice and place it on the “Altar of Incense” that had a mixture of fragrances. These fragrances would be ignited and together they would mix to make a “**sweet fragrance**” unto the Lord. This sweet fragrance or “incense,” would fill the Tabernacle. This “sweet fragrance” is symbolic of the prayers and intercession of God’s people. Of significance is that it had to be ignited by fiery coals used to burn and consume everything of flesh.

The “altar of the Ark of the Covenant” - One purpose of the Ark of the Covenant was its use as God’s holiest “altar of sacrifice.” The Ark of the Covenant was used as the means of atonement carried out upon this “earthly throne” of God’s mercy. It is referred to as the “mercy seat” or “Seat of Atonement.” In Jewish thought, this “altar” of the mercy seat was to be used to “unite” Israel, the Bride, to Yahweh, the Bridegroom. Once a year, on Yom Kippur, the “Day of Atonement” (Leviticus chapter 16) the “mercy seat” served as the third and final holy altar of God when the blood of the unblemished sin-offering was sprinkled on the *mercy seat*. The “mercy seat” actually became a place of “union” between God and His people.

The Ark of the Covenant was thought to be the most holy of all the altars of God for the following reasons:

- It covered the “testimony of God” containing the two tablets of the 10 Commandments.
- The glory of God rested upon it between the wings of the golden cherubim that overshadowed the Ark making it the “earthly throne” of God.
- On the Day of Atonement it became God's earthly "throne of mercy," foreshadowing what Messiah would do. For us as Christians it foreshadows Jesus, who is Messiah, and His act of atonement. It points to the place where the Bride and the Bridegroom will be joined on “that Day.”

In concluding our discussion, the question is this: Are altars still important to Christians today. Did the work of Jesus do away with all of these things? Well, I believe the answer is found in the Book of Revelations. There is still a heavenly "Tabernacle" and there are still "altars" in that heavenly Tabernacle. We find, in heaven, the "altar of sacrifice" which has the blood of the martyrs beneath it (Revelation 6:9; 16:4-7). We see the "golden altar of incense" (Revelation 8:3; 9:13) which represents the worship and intercession of the saints that is "ignited" by the "coals" from the altar of sacrifice. The final and highest altar found in Heaven is the Throne of the Father, the "Mercy Seat" where the Bride, the Body of Christ, will meet with the Bridegroom, Jesus, and be joined forever and ever and ever for all of eternity at the great marriage feast of the Lamb.

As we know, there is another part to the equation of "building altars unto the Lord" and this concerns the "priesthood." That, I will leave for another discussion. However, I pray that you get a little inkling of the importance of setting up "spiritual altars" not only in our places of worship but also in our homes, and with our families. Altars are a place of meeting with God. This is what our churches should be. This is what our homes should be. The most important "altar" of course must be the "altar of our heart," an altar not made by human hands but by the hand of God. Through the blood of Jesus and through the infilling of the Holy Spirit, the "fragrance" that God has created each one of us to be, combined with the "fragrance" of other believers, ignited by the fire of the Holy Spirit that cleanses us from sin, will make a "sweet fragrance" of worship and intercession pleasing and acceptable to our God. Ultimately, isn't that what it is all about.

Below are more "altars" for further study

- Read Genesis 22:9-14 - An "**altar of total sacrifice and worship and trust in God**" Abraham built an altar for Isaac to be sacrificed on. The ram in the thicket became the substitute sacrifice on the altar. An altar of total sacrifice and worship and trust in God was turned into an altar of thanksgiving for God's provision of the sacrifice. It was here that God became known as Yahweh Yireh. This altar was built on Mount Moriah. The scriptures show us another altar that was built by David on Mount Moriah. Ultimately, Mount Moriah became the greatest portal of heaven for it was where the Ark of God's Presence rested within the Temple. Jesus has now become that "altar of total sacrifice" for us as this whole passage of scripture portrays and points to. Jesus is that "portal," through which we can now meet with God because of the Blood of the perfect, pure, unblemished, final sacrifice. Yahweh Yireh (God, the Father) provided the final sacrifice (Jesus).
- Read Genesis 26:23, 24, 25 - An "**altar of remembrance of God's covenant promises**" by Abraham
- Read Exodus 17:14-16 - An "**altar of remembrance and establishment**" - "*And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Yahweh Nissi (Yahweh is my banner).*" God is our "flag, our standard, our banner" that will lead us forward to victory over our worst enemies.
- Read Exodus 24:3,4 - An "**altar of remembrance of the vow to keep the Word of the Lord by the people**"
- Read Joshua 8:30, 31 - An "**altar of remembrance of the covenant at the crossing the Jordan**"
- Read Judges 6:21-24 - An "**altar of peace**" built by Gideon's - "*...Then Gideon built an altar there unto the LORD, and called it Yahweh Shalom...*" God became known at this altar as Yahweh Shalom - The God of our peace.
- Read Judges 6:25,26 - A prophetic "**altar of victory**" by God over His enemies and their false gods - Gideon tore down the altar of Baal and built an altar of the Lord on that spot.
- Read Judges 13:15-24 - An "**altar of visitation**" - Manoah and his wife in the presence of the Angel of the Lord - the result was Samson
- Read 1Kings 18:31-40 - An "**altar of the Lord's power, greatness and might**" - Built by Elijah against the prophets of Baal
- Read Judges 21:1-7 - An "**altar of repentance**" - By Israel for the tribe of Benjamin
- Read 1Samuel 24:18-25 and 1Chronicles 21:26 - An "**altar of worship and intercession**" (a House of Prayer) built by David on Mount Moriah. As previously stated, Abraham built an altar to sacrifice Isaac on this very spot. This was the site for the building of the Temple which obviously became not only a portal to the Throne of heaven but also became God's throne on this earth. Moriah became an altar of God and a "portal" of heaven which it still is and forever will be.