

Altared, A Biblical History

Message Three

Genesis 22: 6-9 (ESV) And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.

7 And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

8 Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

9 When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.

Introduction:

They were built from stones, blocks and wood.

Sometimes they piled the material together roughly.

Sometimes they measured carefully and lay everything out in precision.

Sometimes they were left in the raw state.

Sometimes they covered them with bronze, silver or even gold.

Twenty-five hundred years ago, they were built out in the open air, in valleys, beside riverbeds or on mountain tops.

Today, some of them were elaborate works of art or architecture crafted to be center showpieces in ornate cathedrals.

I am talking about altars.

Many Christians have a mental image of an altar as a place where mysterious religious rituals take place.

Communion wine and wafers are served there.

Prayers are lifted at the altar.

Sometimes, it seems far above and beyond the reach of the common layperson.

Others of us know that the altar is the place where our relationship with God achieves its reality.

The altar is where many have knelt to find the Lord.

The altar is where many have found repentance and forgiveness.

The altar is where many have received spiritual blessings.

The altar is where many have consecrated themselves to God.

The altar is where Godly vision is made clear.

The altar is where souls are galvanized into action.

The altar is where the best things in life happen.

Every Bible patriarch built an altar.

Noah, having been spared along with his wife, his three sons and their wives from the global devastation of the flood, the flood that wiped out all the known civilization of the world, emerged from the ark.

What was the first thing Noah did?

He built an altar.

From that humble construction, he blessed the God who saved him from the fate of the world.

Abraham obeyed the call of God to leave Haran and sojourn in a new land.

God's covenant provided that wherever Abraham went and as far as his eye could see, that land would become his.

Abraham immediately built an altar to honor the Lord.



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By the same token, you should note that Abraham's nephew, Lot, never built an altar.

He chose the well-watered plains of Jordan to dwell in, and simply took his family there with no recognition that God was the provider.

In fact, there was never an altar associated with the name of Lot in the Bible.

Elijah, the flamboyant prophet who was the scourge of King Ahab, put the power of the Lord on display upon the altar.

After he goaded the false prophets of Baal into calling upon their god, a vast exercise in futility, Elijah commanded the servant to build an altar.

They piled stones, one upon another.

They poured twelve barrels of water on the sacrifice.

At the simple prayer of Elijah, the true God of heaven visited the altar by sending fire upon the sacrifice.

The altar of Elijah became the symbol of God's power.

1. How Do You Build an Altar?

There is a very revealing passage found in *Exodus 20: 22-26 (ESV)* And the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the people of Israel: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven.

23 You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold.

24 An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.

25 If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it.

26 And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it.'

The altars of pagan nations were elaborate, ostentatious works of art.

They didn't speak of humility, but pride.

They did not bring glory to God; instead, they glorified man.

In fact, tribes, cities and even nations competed to see who could build the most grandiose altar and temple.

Then, many heathen nations had temple prostitutes and they went through ceremonies that exalted the flesh rather than honoring the holiness of God.

This is not what God wanted.

“Build my altar out of earth.” If you do make it out of stone, don't carve it, chisel it, or shape it into something beautiful. And don't glorify your flesh in worship to me.”

In other words, don't make your sacrifice to God all about you—make it about HIM!

Don't make it about the beautiful altar you can build with your hands—make it about the sacrifice you are willing to give to God!

Today, altars are usually housed in a temple.

There are beautiful cathedrals in the world: Notre Dame in Paris, St. Paul's basilica and the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican City, St. Paul's Cathedral in London.

The cathedral in Strasbourg, France is the most elaborate structure.

But today, not much worship goes on in most of these temples.

They attract tourists who are interested in Gothic architecture and a storied past.

The bible says that we are the temple of the Holy Ghost.

Do not buy into the popular view that your temple must reflect the world's idea of beauty or fashionable.



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The bible says to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, not the beauty of Hollywood.

The more you try to make yourself pleasing to the world, the less you make yourself pleasing to God.

Do you know what God loves?

He loves the simple, spontaneous free-flowing worship that comes out of our hearts.

He is not looking for pomp and ceremony; he is looking for genuine commitment to Him.

2. What is the purpose of an altar?

An altar is built as a memorial.

The builder can go back and offer another sacrifice at the altar, and thereby relive the great event that it was built to commemorate.

When the priests of Israel built the altar in honor of their crossing miraculously over into Canaan, they were telling generations present and future, something great happened here.

Never, ever forget what happened to us as a people and a nation in this place.

Never ever forget that it was the hand of God that brought it about.

An altar means that something with great personal meaning to the life of an individual happened at a certain place.

Jacob had a powerful dream about a ladder ascending from earth to heaven as he was on the road to flee from his brother, Esau.

On this ladder, he saw angels going up and down.

He awakened and built an altar to the Lord, saying, "Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not."

He built the altar out of one stone, the same one he used as a pillow when he saw his dream.

An altar is built as a symbol of a place of sacrifice.

I hope that word registers on your heart today.

Sacrifice.

My salvation cost me something.

This does not mean that I am saved by works, but it does mean that I must forsake my own inventions, my own will, my own preferences to embrace the Gospel.

In *2 Samuel, 24: 24 (ESV)* ***But the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.*** King David had been offered, free of charge, a place to sacrifice to the Lord.

No one will be greatly used of God until they have built an altar.

If you want the approval and blessing of God in your life, you must sacrifice those things that have great meaning to your flesh, your ego, your pleasure, your power in this world.

The altar is where you establish an entirely new set of priorities for life.

This church is looking toward the future.

We anticipate a great move of God.

We are expecting great things from God.

But God is not interested in blessing anything that brings glory to us.

Before we receive anything from Him, we must build an altar.

The altar we build must not be the usual handclapping, standing, raising hands and saying memorized words to God.



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God is looking for some meaningful sacrifices.

Bring your goals, your dreams, your desires to the altar.

Remember, God never demands something from you without giving something back to you of greater value!

Give Him your life and He will give you back a life much better.

Give Him your dreams and He will replace it with a dream that far exceeds your own imagination!

Give Him your desires, and He will create in you a new heart—a heart that desires righteousness, holiness and peace.

An altar is where we continually make an offering unto the Lord.

This was seen in the Bible as a symbolic sense as well.

In the Old Testament, the priests sent up sweet incense to the Lord from the altars.

In the New Testament, this corresponds to our praise and worship that we express to God, and the good things we do for people.

Hebrews 13: 14-15 (ESV) For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Praise must flow heavenward from our hearts.

The altar is where I worship the Lord.

Church attendance, maintaining a holy lifestyle, a commitment to truth.

The altar represents the way I worship the Lord.

Jesus told us emphatically, that “...***John 4: 23-24 (ESV) But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.***”



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24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Today, we build an altar to the Lord by becoming a living, walking, talking memorial of Him.

By sacrificing ourselves for Him, by turning our lives into a continual offering to Him.

Something happens when you build your altar.

When you take the elements of your life, your body, your soul and spirit, your mind and strength and build an altar to God, you testify to all who see you.

This is what the Apostle Paul did.

Paul said, **Romans 1: 16 (ESV) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

Not only that, but you, yourself, your body, mind and soul become a witness to the world of the power of God. **Acts 1: 8 (ESV) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”**

Let me take you back to the altar of Elijah.

He placed the sacrifice on the altar.

He poured water on the sacrifice.

He prayed.

That was the extent of his human ability and power.

It was up to God to send the fire.

That ought to sound familiar to Pentecostals! **Acts 2: 1-4 (ESV) When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.**

2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.



3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Something else happens at the altar.

This is where you honor and glorify God.

I worship by my tongue.

I worship by physical motions.

I worship through my tithes and offerings.

I worship by my commitments to God.

I worship by living a holy, consecrated life for God.

All these things are not incidentals.

They are not meaningless, liturgical rituals.

They are real-life components of my sincere worship to my God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lastly, it is at the altar that God makes his covenants.

He made a covenant with Noah.

He preserved Isaac for Abraham.

He blessed Jacob and revived him at the altar.

He sent fire on Elijah's altar.

He required the families of Israel to meet Him at the altar with sin offerings, and when they did, He kept his covenant to forgive their sins. **2 Chronicles 7: 14 (ESV)**
if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.



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God will do the same for you if you build an altar.

It must be an altar of sacrifice, of worship, of thanksgiving.

Do not demand great things from God unless you are prepared to sacrifice great things for God.

The fire does not fall on a barren altar, a selfish life, the pursuit of personal pleasure or a monument built to our own greatness.

The fire falls on the sacrifice.

There is one more fact about the altar of Elijah that I want to share with you today.

His altar was not a new altar.

It had been there before, but the false prophets of Baal, along with the neglect of the people of Israel had broken it down.

1 Kings 18: 29-30 (ESV) And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come near to me." And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down.

If you have never built an altar for God in your life, you need to build it now.

If you once had an altar, but you allowed it to be broken down, now is the time for you to repair it.

If all you have are the remnants of a past consecrated life, if you are trying to survive on memories of your experience with God, you need to repair your altar.

He's not asking for you to do anything elaborate.



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Just bring yourself, your earth and stones, and start to rebuild that which you once had.

It will be good to feel the fire once again.

The Altar (Ray Boltz)

The service is nearing an end
The choir is singing "Just As I Am"
And now as the old song is played
People at the altar
Are kneeling down to pray
Some are finding mercy
Forgiveness for their sin
Some are fighting battles
And they're struggling to win
The time has come
To give them to the Lord
That's what the altar is for

That's what this altar is for
You don't have to carry
Those burdens anymore
There's a light in the darkness
There's a love that's true
And Jesus is waiting
He is waiting here for you
Go quickly now
Before they close the door
That's what the altar is for

A father is praying with his son
A mother kneels beside them
Thanking God they've come
An old man
Is standing there in tears
Giving up a part of him



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That he's held back for years
Hearts are being broken
Lives are being changed
And those who call upon Him
Will never be the same
The time has come
To give in to the Lord
That's what this altar is for

Go quickly now
Before they close the door
And you can give your burdens
To the Lord
That's what this altar is for

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- 2. What Is The Purpose of an Altar?**