

The Altar

(A Meeting Place with God)

This teaching looks at the different types of Old Testament altars, the New Testament altar in the life of a Christian, and the Priestly duties in caring and maintaining the Altar of God.

Outline

Definition of Altar: An elevated place or structure before which religious ceremonies may be enacted or upon which sacrifices may be offered.

- The altar was specifically instituted for the purpose of meeting with God.
- It was the place where men prayed, sacrificed, struggled and offered themselves in devotion to God.
- It was a place of contact.
- It was a place where humanity encountered Divinity.

The First Altar — An Altar of Covenant

- Gen. 8:19-21 - Erected by Noah after the flood waters subsided. Perhaps an altar of thanksgiving that God had spared them. God covenants to Noah with a rainbow.



The Second Altar (Abraham's first altar- An altar of Promise)

- Gen. 12:7 And the Lord appeared to Abram and said, unto thy seed will I give this land: and there Abram built an altar to the Lord, who appeared to him.

The most significant altars in the Bible

In the tabernacle, and afterward in the temple, two altars were erected. (1.) The altar of burnt offering and "the table of the Lord". This altar, as erected in the tabernacle, is described in Ex. 27:1-8. It was a hollow square, 5 cubits in length and in breadth, and 3 cubits in height. It was made of shittim wood, and was overlaid with plates of brass. Its corners were ornamented with "horns".

The Brazen Altar (The Place of Sacrifice)

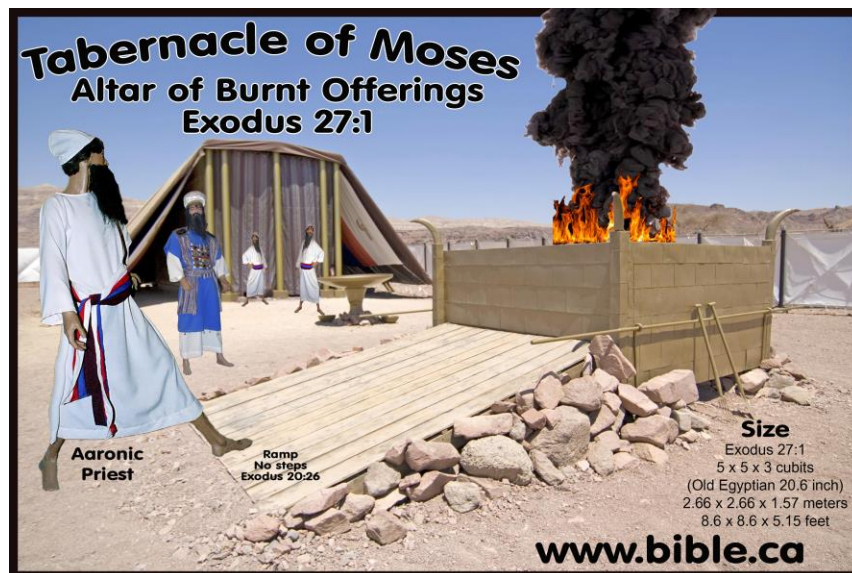


Cubit is a measurement from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. (Usually 18-22")

That would make the altar approx. 7ft. 4in. square and about 4 1/2 ft. high

In Solomon's temple the altar was of larger dimensions and was made wholly of brass, covering a structure of stone or earth.

It was in the tabernacle and in Solomon's temple that you find the presence of God most intensely revealed.



An interesting thing about this altar:

This altar was renewed by Asa (2 Chr. 15:8). It was removed by Ahaz (2 Kings 16:14), and "cleansed" by Hezekiah, in the latter part of whose reign it was rebuilt. It was finally broken up and carried away by the Babylonians (Jer. 52:17). After the Israelites returned from captivity it was re-erected (Ezra 3:3, 6) on the same place where it had formerly stood.

Which tells me that the altar in our lives has the ability to become polluted. It can be removed. It can be broken down and carried away by the enemy if not protected properly. But Praise God, it can also be cleansed, renewed, re-built and put back in its proper place!

Old Testament Altars:

Genesis 8:20-21 - An Altar of Covenant

Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. 21 And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.

Genesis 22:9-14- An Altar of Testing Faith

And they came to the place which God had told him of; [on Mount Moriah] and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-Jireh: [The Lord my Provider] as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.

Genesis 35:1-3 -An Altar of Confirmation & Recommitment

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 fleddest 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.

Deut. 27: 4-5 — An Altar of Remembrance

Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaster them with plaster. And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them.

1 Kings 1: 50-53 - An Altar of Desperation

And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar.

1 Kings 8: 54 - An Altar of Dedication and Blessing

And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this prayer and supplication unto the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven.

2 Chronicles 15:8 — An Altar of Renewal and Re-dedication

And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from mount Ephraim, and renewed the altar of the LORD, that was before the porch of the LORD.

Psalms 43:3-4 — An Altar of Praise

O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.

The New Testament Altar

- In the Old Testament the location of the Altar was in the temple behind the veil of the Holy of HOLIES and remained up to the time of Christ.
- It was here that the High Priest went once a year to sacrifice for the people.
- It was the altar of the outer court that only selected priests could tend to.
- Ordinary people could not approach the altar of God or his presence.

Matt. 27:50-51 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;

- Jesus died so that we could have _____ to the Holy Of HOLIES.
- To come directly to the altar of God personally.
- Because of Jesus we can no longer depend or need to depend upon a priest to come near to God for us.
- The _____ for meeting God at the altar has now become _____

1 Corinthians 3:16

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

1 Corinthians 6:19

What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

QUESTION? - If it is true that we are now the temple of God and if it is true that the Altar of God resides in the temple where now is the Altar of God?

1 Peter 2:5

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:9

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light;

QUESTION? — If we are a priest unto God because of Jesus and if it is the Priests duty to care for the altar of God, then who's responsibility is it to care for the altar in our temple?

Priestly duties and responsibilities to the Altar

3 main responsibilities of the priests in caring for the altar

1. They tended to the lamps which gave light to the holy of HOLIES.

Leviticus 24:2 Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually.

Leviticus 24:4 He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick before the LORD continually.

- Oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit in our lives
- We must allow the Holy Spirit to continually flow in our lives to keep the lamps full with oil.

The Danger of not tending the lamps.

- Light grows dim and shadows creep in.
- Things become distorted and unfocused.
- What once was clearly right or wrong now is unclear and uncertain.
- We reason with ourselves and let things slide that we never let slide before.
- We can grow accustomed to the dim and deceive ourselves into thinking we are still in the light.
- In other words if we continually allow the holy spirit to have less and less influence in our lives, the dimmer the light becomes and eventually we can end up in total darkness.

2 Cor. 6:14 What fellowship has light with darkness?

2. They offered sacrifices and offerings.

Leviticus 22:20 - But whatsoever hath a blemish, that shall ye not offer: for it shall not be acceptable for you.

46 times the phrase "without blemish" comes up in the KJV in regards to what God accepts as an offering and sacrifice.

- They were without blemish or defect.
- They did not offer lame or damaged offerings and then keep the best for themselves.
- They did not offer idols.
- The very best that they had was what they offered.
- It was all God would accept.

You may ask what does that have to do with me? We don't bring sacrifices and offerings to the Altar anymore?

1 Corinthians 3:17 If any man defiles the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

2 Corinthians 6:16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God; as God has said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

- God requires our best! Not the leftovers after we have given ourselves to work, family, Activities.
- But the first fruits of our time, energy, and resources.

Matthew 5:23,24 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

- God is still interested in the condition of what we bring to the Altar.

3. They Kept The Fire Burning.

The fire on the altar was not permitted to go out (Lev. 6:9).

Hebrews 12:29 For our God is a consuming fire.

- It was the fire that consumed the sacrifice.
- It is our passion for God that will cause his presence to consume us.
- Our passion for God must be like a consuming fire.
- It must fill every fiber of our being, heart, mind, and soul.
- It must burn continuously without going out.
- It is the measuring unit that tells god just how much of him we really want.

Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Ask yourselves

- Are my lamps full with the oil of the Holy Spirit?
- Is the altar well lit, or have the lamps begun to dim?
- Are my eyes adjusting to the dimness?
- Am I letting behavior and sins slide that I never allowed before?
- Are my offerings the best I can give or are they lame and damaged as I keep the best for myself?
- Do I need to tear down any idols and consecrate myself again on the altar?
- Have I allowed the world and foreign gods to take up residence in the temple?
- Is the passion of my heart consuming me like a fire for God or has it grown cold?
- Do I seek to continually keep the fire burning asking the Holy Spirit to fan the flames?
- Do I desire God above all else?

No one can answer these questions but you. Only you know the true condition of your Altar.

On a scale of 1-10, where would you say your fire is burning today? (Circle One)

Almost Out 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Passionate and on fire for God