



BUILD ME AN ALTAR

'Preparing a Place of Sacrifice'

by Matt German

Many individuals in Scripture built an altar to Yahweh, including Noah, Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, King Saul, David, and Solomon. In fact, Abram (Abraham) built at least 4 different altars to Yahweh at different times. These were all men in positions of leadership – either within the nation or within their own families. Those in leadership today could learn some valuable lessons from their example; in fact, every believer today can benefit from understanding what it means to 'build an altar to Yahweh'.

The word 'altar' in the Bible is translated from the Hebrew *mizbêach* (Strong's H4196, pronounced miz-báy-akh). It derives from another Hebrew word, *zâbâch* (H2076), which means to slaughter an animal (usually in sacrifice).

An altar is, first and foremost, a place of sacrifice. It is a particular place for a particular purpose. In the Biblical record we often read that so-and-so "built an altar there". In fact, the location was frequently given a specific name, and the altar became a type of monument or memorial to what Yahweh had done there. Altars were built for many purposes, including thanksgiving, worship, supplication, and even intercession.

Gen. 12:1-8 Now Yahweh said to Abram, "Get out of your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation. I will bless you, and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you. In you will all of the families of the earth be blessed." So Abram went, as Yahweh had spoken to him. Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed out of Haran. Abram took Sarai his wife, Lot his brother's son, all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls who they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan. Into the land of Canaan they came. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. The Canaanite was then in the land. Yahweh appeared to Abram, and said, "I will give this land to your seed." He built an altar there to Yahweh, who appeared to him. He left from there to the mountain on the

east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to Yahweh, and called on the name of Yahweh.

One aspect of this story that has always fascinated me is that this is the first mention in Scripture of Abram having an encounter with Yahweh; there is no record prior to this that Abram even knew Yahweh – in fact, his father, Terah, served other gods (Josh. 24:2) and is reputed to have been an idol-maker. Yet when Yahweh spoke to Abram and told him to get up and leave his father's house, Abram immediately obeyed. It was after Yahweh appeared to Him and showed him the land of promise that Abram responded by building an altar to Him. Then, journeying on a little way, he built another altar to Him between Bethel and Ai.

Later, after Lot was separated from him, Abram built an altar at the oaks of Mamre (Gen. 13:18). Finally, in obedience to Yahweh's command to sacrifice his son Isaac, he built an altar at Mt. Moriah (Gen. 22:9). Obviously, Abram (Abraham) understood the importance of altars. It seems equally apparent that he passed on this understanding to Isaac (see Gen. 26:24-25) and Jacob, as each of them built an altar to Yahweh, as well.

Gen. 35:1-7 Elohim said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and live there. Make there an altar to Elohim, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother." Then Jacob said to his household, and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, change your garments. Let us arise, and go up to Bethel. I will make there an altar to Elohim, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." They gave to Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem. They traveled: and a terror of Elohim was on the cities that were round about them, and they didn't pursue the sons of Jacob. So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan (the same is Bethel), he and all the people who were with him. He built an altar there, and called the place El Beth El; because there Elohim was revealed to him, when he fled from the face of his brother.

Jacob, by direction of Yahweh, built an altar to Him in the place where He had revealed Himself to Jacob. Notice that the first thing Jacob did was to command his household to put away their foreign gods, purify themselves, and change their garments. I believe that it was because of these acts of holiness that "the terror of Elohim" was upon the inhabitants of the land and they didn't go up against Jacob or his sons (v5).

We can glean great spiritual lessons from these simple acts. In order to build a spiritual altar to Yahweh in our own hearts, we must put away the foreign 'gods' of self, pride, etc. We must purify ourselves through the washing of water with the Word (Eph. 5:26) and put on the garment of praise and the robe of righteousness (Isa. 61:3, 10). When we do these things, the enemy will not be able to come against us; Yahweh will make even our enemies to be at peace with us (Pro. 16:7).

An Altar of Stone

As stated earlier an altar is a place of sacrifice, of worship. In short, it is a place whose purpose is to help the worshipper to draw nearer to Yahweh. However, we must also understand that Yahweh has an established protocol for how one may draw near to Him. We see this theme repeated over and over in Scripture. One such example can be seen in the instructions that Yahweh gave to Moses regarding His altar:

Ex. 20:24-26 You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace-offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My Name I will come to you and I will bless you. If you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones; for if you lift up your tool on it, you have polluted it. Neither shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness may not be exposed to it.

These were very specific instructions. In our day we might tend to gloss over some of these details, but they were obviously important enough to Yahweh that He gave them to Moses.

First, He said that the altar was to be made of earth or of unhewn (uncut) stones – stones upon which no tool had been used. This is significant: tools are man-made, so the purpose of this instruction seems to be to make clear that man cannot draw near to Yahweh through his own ingenuity or logic. Notice also that Moses was not instructed to use brick, with which the children of Israel were certainly very familiar from their days in Egypt. Bricks are cast from a man-made form, but one cannot approach the Creator of the heavens through his own man-made 'form' of worship. It's also important to note that the use of uncut stone would have had a simple but profound result: every altar would be unique. It would have its own character and its own qualities – just like each individual believer. We are not carbon copies of one another. The spiritual altar that we build in our own lives will be unique to us and our life experiences.

We also must realize that building an altar is a process. It isn't easy or convenient; rather, it takes effort, perseverance, and time. Not only must one search in order to find stones that are suitable to build a proper altar, but then the actual process of

construction must be undertaken. It's not as simple as gathering a bunch of rocks into a pile; the right stones must be chosen and then fitted together to make the altar.

What does this have to do with the modern-day believer? What lessons can we learn from this? Each of us must search within our lives to find that which is fit and proper for an altar to Yahweh. Yahshua said that we must "fall on the Rock and be broken" (Matt. 21:44). We must take those fragments from our past – the broken dreams and hard lessons, as well as those things that were once good and useful but that no longer have any life in them – and use them to build an altar to Yahweh.

Finally, Yahweh's instruction to Moses makes it apparent that it matters how one approaches the altar! He was forbidden to "go up by steps" to His altar, lest his nakedness be exposed. How we come together matters; do we examine our hearts before coming together to worship? Do we prepare ourselves to come into His presence?

David's Altar of Intercession

King David made the tragic mistake of numbering the people of Israel. In response Yahweh gave David a choice of three punishments for the nation: 3 years of famine, 3 months of being consumed by its enemies, or 3 days of suffering the sword of Yahweh. David, recognizing his error, asked to fall into Yahweh's hand. This resulted in the unleashing of a pestilence that killed 70,000 men, and Yahweh sent an angel with a sword to destroy the city of Jerusalem. However, as he was about to destroy it, Yahweh repented of the evil and stopped the angel at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite (see 1 Chr. 21:1-15).

The angel of Yahweh instructed Gad, the seer, to tell David to raise up an altar to Yahweh in the threshing floor of Ornan (v18). David immediately responded:

1 Chr. 21:22-28 Then David said to Ornan, Give me the place of this threshing floor, that I may build thereon an altar to Yahweh: for the full price shall you give it me, that the plague may be stayed from the people. Ornan said to David, Take it to you, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: behold, I give you the oxen for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meal-offering; I give it all. King David said to Ornan, No; but I will most assuredly buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is yours for Yahweh, nor offer a burnt-offering without cost. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight. David built there an altar to Yahweh, and offered burnt offerings and peace-offerings, and called on Yahweh; and He answered him from the sky by fire on the altar of burnt offering. Yahweh commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath of it. At that

time, when David saw that Yahweh had answered him in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there.

This passage reveals another profound truth: it always costs something to build an altar to Yahweh. David understood this and wanted – insisted on – paying the full price. He wouldn't accept the land for free, nor would he accept for free the goods required for offerings. Compare that to the attitude of many believers today who want a "discount" solution and to serve Yahweh "on the cheap". And then they wonder why Yahweh doesn't move dramatically on their behalf!

The altar that David built was an altar of intercession, and he paid the full price for it. Though his own error had caused the plague in the first place, it was his attitude and commitment afterwards to which Yahweh responded. In fact, Yahweh answered by fire from heaven. Fire, of course, purifies and consumes. If we offer something to Yahweh and our flesh is involved, we're going to get burned! He will do what He has to do to consume the flesh.

After He answered by fire, He then commanded the angel to put its sword back into its sheath. But notice that David didn't just walk away when he saw that the plague had been stayed. He took the further step of offering sacrifices there. The altar of intercession had now become an altar of thanksgiving.

The Altar of a Holy People

Yahweh also gave very specific instructions concerning altars to the Israelites prior to their entry into the Promised Land:

Deut. 12:1-7 These are the statutes and the ordinances which you shall observe to do in the land which Yahweh, the Elohim of your fathers, has given you to possess it, all the days that you live on the earth. You shall surely destroy all the places in which the nations that you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains, and on the hills, and under every green tree: and you shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and burn their Asherim with fire; and you shall cut down the engraved images of their gods; and you shall destroy their name out of that place. You shall not do so to Yahweh your Elohim. But to the place which Yahweh your Elohim shall choose out of all your tribes, to put His Name there, even to His habitation shall you seek, and there you shall come; and there you shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and the heave-offering of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill-offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock: and there you shall eat before Yahweh your Elohim, and you shall rejoice in all that you put your hand to...

Notice that He told them to break down the altars and forms of worship of the pagan gods of the land and to destroy their

name out of that place. The Israelites were to leave no trace of those pagan ways. This was actually a reiteration of what Yahweh had told them earlier:

Deut. 7:5-6 ...you shall break down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars, and hew down their Asherim, and burn their engraved images with fire. For you are a holy people to Yahweh your Elohim: Yahweh your Elohim has chosen you to be a people for His own possession, above all peoples who are on the face of the earth.

Yahweh's chosen people are to be a holy people. Before we can build an altar to Him, sometimes some things have to come down. These aren't just pagan traditions that we might have inherited; we must also break down the altars to self and pride that we might have allowed to persist in our lives even after we became believers.

Hebr. 13:7-17 Remember your leaders, men who spoke to you the word of Elohim, and considering the results of their conduct, imitate their faith. Yahshua Messiah is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Don't be carried away by various and strange teachings, for it is good that the heart be established by grace, not by food, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited. We have an altar from which those who serve the holy tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside of the camp. Therefore Yahshua also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside of the gate. Let us therefore go forth to Him outside of the camp, bearing His reproach. For we don't have here an enduring city, but we seek that which is to come. Through Him, then, let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to Elohim continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to His Name. But don't forget to be doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices Elohim is well pleased. Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they watch on behalf of your souls, as those who will give account, that they may do this with joy, and not with groaning, for that would be unprofitable for you.

We have an altar from which those who served the holy tabernacle had no right to eat (v10). The sacrifices that Yahweh is pleased with are sacrifices of praise and the faith confession of our lips; of doing good and sharing; and of submitting ourselves to those in spiritual authority in our lives. When we submit to His established leadership, we are sacrificing self and self-will.

Psa. 51:17 "The sacrifices of Elohim are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O Elohim, You will not despise."

Let us build an altar that is pleasing to Him, in humility and brokenness. He is saying again, "Build Me an altar!"

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Yahweh's Feast Calendar – 2011

We understand that people have different understandings of Yahweh's calendar. These are the feast dates for 2011 as observed by Lion of Judah Family Worship Center:

Passover*	Apr. 17 th (Sun.)
Days of Unleavened Bread	Apr. 18 th – 24 th (Mon. – Sun.)
Pentecost	June 12 th (Sun.)
Trumpets	Sep. 28 th (Wed.)
Day of Atonement	Oct. 7 th (Fri.)
Feast of Tabernacles	Oct. 12 th – 18 th (Wed. – Tue.)
Last Great Day	October 19 th (Wed.)

** observed the evening before*

Bear in mind that the Biblical day begins at sunset the night before.

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