

Do You Need a Fresh Altar Experience?

An altar is a place where God alters our lives. Altars are mentioned over 400 times in the Bible, indicating their prominent role in the lives of God's people. Most Old Testament characters built or used them to offer animal sacrifices as atonement for sin and to worship Yahweh—the one, true God. In ancient times, an altar was usually a simple stone structure on which religious rites were performed. Pagans sacrificed at shrines often called “high places” (elevated or hilltop sites) to please and appease their false gods or idols. In Christian churches, an altar is a place to stand or kneel before the Lord to worship or pray. Salvation often occurs on an initial trip to an altar, but the altar should be used regularly thereafter. Done properly, the altar experience brings us and keeps us close to God. An altar is not limited to a fixed location inside a church building; it can be anywhere we contact heaven and make a spiritual connection with our Creator.

The first “altar experience” presumably occurred in the Garden of Eden. Prior to the fall, there was no need for an altar because Adam and Eve enjoyed unbroken fellowship with their Maker (Gen. 3:8). After the fall, God made them coats of animal skins setting a precedent—the only way sinful man can be accepted in the presence of a holy God is with a blood sacrifice (Gen. 3:21). The first parents must have modeled the altar experience or how else did Abel know how to bring an acceptable sacrifice to God? Cain offered fruits and vegetables he grew and was rejected, while Abel brought a lamb (a blood sacrifice) and was accepted. Ironically, the first murder was over religion. In these brothers we see a contrast of two religions: Cain represents the religion of works (man's effort to reach God); Abel represents the religion of grace

(God's effort to reach man).

The first altar actually mentioned in Scripture was after the flood, when "Noah built an altar to the Lord, and . . . offered burnt offerings on the altar. The Lord smelled a soothing aroma" (Gen. 8:20b-21a). God later gave specific instructions on how to make altars (Ex. 20:24-26). Abraham built several altars, most notably the one on Mount Moriah, which he named Jehovah-Jireh because God provided a substitute sacrifice (a ram) for his son Isaac (Gen. 22:9-14). Notice Abraham laid his most precious possession on the altar. God did not take Isaac from him, but He did require that he place him on the altar. Later Isaac and Jacob built their own altars to the Lord (Gen. 26:25; 35:1). Centuries later Moses built an altar to honor God for helping Israel defeat the Amalekites and called it Jehovah-Nissi, meaning "the Lord our banner" of victory (Ex. 17:15). Joshua, Samuel, David and Solomon all built altars. When God called Gideon to deliver Israel from the Midianites, he named his altar Jehovah-Shalom—the Lord our peace—to proclaim how God can provide peace even in a time of war. Furthermore, he destroyed his father's pagan altar, earning him the nickname "Jerubbaal," meaning "striver against Baal" (Judg. 6:24-32).

Both Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's temple contained a brazen altar. It was the first article of furniture inside the doorway of the outer court. Before the priests could enter the holy place, they had to offer atonements (coverings for sin) on the brazen altar and wash in the brazen laver (a basin of water). Brass in Bible symbolism speaks of judgment. So, sin had to be dealt with first before they could approach God's presence. The tabernacle and temple also contained a golden altar inside the holy place. This altar was only used to burn incense, symbolic of prayer and worship (Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4). It was placed directly in front of the veil (curtain) to the holy of holies indicating that prayer and worship is the closest thing to the heart of God and our highest calling. David

understood the symbolism, “Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Ps. 141:2).

When Elijah confronted King Ahab and the false prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, he “repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down” (1 Kings 18:30). God’s altar had been forsaken and replaced with pagan altars to Baal—the storm, rain and fertility god who was worshipped as “the rider of the clouds.” But Baal was powerless to send rain to end the drought or to send fire on the heathen altar. Then Elijah did the unthinkable—he poured 12 barrels of water over the sacrifice on God’s altar. Water was the most valuable commodity of that time. Remember, it had not rained for over three years. Crops and livestock were dying, rivers and lakes were drying up and people were starving. But an empty altar receives no fire. One man had the courage to repair the broken altar and look at the result: God sent fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice, a backslidden nation repented, rain was restored and Israel won a total spiritual victory.

The altar has been neglected or replaced in too many lives, homes and churches. An altar is spiritually significant in many ways and represents a place of sacrifice, judgment, death, repentance, atonement, forgiveness, transfer, prayer, worship, victory, deliverance and breakthrough. The altar is where we die to our will and surrender to God’s will. Animal horns were often placed on the four corners of altars to tie down sacrifices (Ps. 118:27). A horn is an animal’s strength, defense and a powerful weapon against any enemy. Likewise, our source of strength and the key to spiritual victory is found in renewing the altar experience. Like Elijah, let’s repair the broken altar and watch God alter our lives and circumstances for the better. {eo}

Ben Godwin is the author of four books and pastors the Goodsprings Full Gospel Church. To read more articles, visit his website at [http://www.bengodwin.com](#) and take advantage of his 4-book bundle for

\$25.