

# BETWEEN THE LINES

## *A Deeper Look...*

### #920- ALTARS: Sites of God's Provision

Some have defined the Hebrew term *Mitzbeach* (Altar) to mean "To approach". The Scripture lists five specific sites or types of altars. Let's take a brief moment to delineate those five and cite a reference or two for each...

- 1) The altar of Sacrifice- Genesis 8, 22.
- 2) The altar of Memorial- Genesis 35, Joshua 4.
- 3) The Burnt Offering altar of the wilderness Tabernacle- Exodus 27, 35.
  - 3a) The high altar of Solomon's Temple- I Kings 8, II Chronicles 7.
  - 3b) The altar of Herod's Temple- Matthew 5, Matthew 23.
- 4) The Incense alters of each temple- Exodus 30, I Chronicles 6, Luke 1.
- 5) The altars erected for false deities- Judges 6, Acts 17.

A fair, and very challenging, question for each Christian is do I have any of these altars as active elements in my life? If I do, what would they be?

- Do I have a focal point for the full payment of sin?
- Have I set specific points to demarcate God's goodness in my life?
- Do I have a consistent presence and permeation as in #4?
- Are there any altars like those in #5?
- Am I willing to ask that last question in light of John 16:7,8,&13?

**In Conclusion:** Contemporary Christians tend to look at the elements of the altars as being outdated concepts that only served the purpose of God when He was dealing with ancient, barbaric, unenlightened people.

We would do well to consider the psychological and spiritual role of each of the altar styles and revisit their importance in enhancing or detracting from consistent spiritual growth.

(After all, wasn't it the One who created us who defined what we needed in this realm and what would destroy us? Or have we outgrown His wisdom in our enlightened understanding? It sounds a little arrogant, doesn't it?)

**Search The Word...** Read Genesis 4, Exodus 20, Leviticus 10, and II Chronicles 26 to be reminded of God's attitude concerning arrogance at the altar site.

### **The End of Specific Altars in Judaism:**

Many Christians are confused as to when the process of sacrifice ended. When Jerusalem fell to the Romans in 70 a.d. the great second temple was destroyed. Jewish Christians only saw it all as the fulfillment of the

words of Jesus in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. They already had a epistle/text (Hebrews) in their possession that focused them on an eternal Sanctuary and a *Kohen Gadol* (great priest) who would "ever live to make intercession" and so the loss of the Moriah structure was only affirmation of their faith.

But what of the Jews who did not accept the words of Jesus or Hebrews? They again had to reevaluate the future without the central site of altar. Here's a brief synopsis of two centuries of adjustment within Judaism to the loss of temple...

- Rome mints the *Judea Capta* coin in honor of the Jerusalem victory, 70. a.d.
- All Jerusalem temple tax is allocated to the Jupiter Capitolinus temple in Rome.
- Many Jews begin to refuse to eat meat and wine for they were temple elements.
- The priesthood deteriorates without the presence of the cultic center.
- Synagogues rise to preeminence for prayer, singing and study of Torah.
- Synagogues become the spiritual governance seat for the communities.
- Usha, of the Galilee, becomes the center for determination after Bar-Kocheba (135 a.d.).
- Rome allows Jabneh to become Judaism's center at Johanan Ben Zacchai's request.
- The debates of the students of Hillel and Shammai shape Jewish thinking for centuries.
- Eventually "tradition" becomes the "portable homeland" for Jews everywhere.
- Many elements of sanctuary, including altar, are assimilated into home ritual.
- "Sanctuary" becomes an ancient, unnecessary part of the heritage.

**In Conclusion:** Jews still have "temple" and they still have "the altar"... it's part of daily living and incorporated into ritual whether they live in Ethiopia, Chicago, or Jerusalem. That's the import of the phrase, "portable homeland".

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**What Went On The Altar?:** If you were to search the Word you'd find all the following items were offered on the altar at various times and for specific purposes. Why not educate yourself as to when and why these were used?

- Sheep
- Lambs
- Goats
- Oxen
- Bulls
- Heifers
- Pigeons
- Turtledoves
- Grain
- Wine

**Search the Word...** Saul was rebuked by the prophet Samuel for his establishment of an altar site in **I Samuel 13**. Why? (**Deuteronomy 12** may give you a starting clue...)

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