

NEW HOPE CHURCH OF GOD

ALTAR WORKERS TRAINING

LESSON 1 Part A: Ministering At The Altar

WHAT IS THE ALTAR?

A. Old Testament Usage

1. The Hebrew word for altar is *mizbeach*, which comes from: to slaughter an animal (usually in sacrifice).
2. It is used many times in the Old Testament.
3. Some examples are:
 - (a) *“Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offering on it.” (Gen. 8:20).*
 - (b) *“When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.” (Gen. 22:9).*
 - (c) See also: Ex. 17:15; 40:10; 1 Chron. 6:49; etc.

B. New Testament Usage

1. The Greek word for altar is *thusiasterion*, which means “a place of sacrifice.”
2. It is used several times in the New Testament.
 - (a) *“Therefore, if you offer your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” (Matt. 5:23-24)*
 - (b) See also: Heb. 13:10; James 2:21; Rev. 8:5.

C. The Brief Study Above Reveals Two Facts About the Altar:

1. **The Altar is a Place of Sacrifice**
 - (a) In both Hebrew and Greek, the meaning of the word **altar** makes it clear that ***the altar is first and foremost a place where sacrifice is made.***
 - (1) In the Old Testament, it was a place where animals were sacrificed to God to make restitution for the sins of the people (See Heb. 9:7).
 - (2) When Jesus Christ offered Himself for our sins, it was done on the ultimate altar: ***“When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not part of this creation. He did not enter by means of blood of goats, and calves; but He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption”*** (Heb. 9:11-12 NIV)

- (3) From this we can now say: ***“Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you already are. For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth”*** (1 Cor. 5:7-8 NIV).
- (b) Our altars today are not the place where lambs and bulls are slaughtered for sins, because Jesus Christ Himself provided for that.
- (1) **They are and should be the place where people give up what is important to them so that God might be able to make them the people He intended them to be from the beginning.**
- (2) We hear about people leaving all kinds of things at the altar—cigarettes, whiskey, weapons, etc. We may not see this as a sacrifice but those who leave them it certainly is! Their lives have been built around these things.
- (c) **The most important thing they leave is the “old nature of sin” in exchange for “the new life in Jesus Christ!”** (2 Cor. 5:17). (Also Rom. 6:6; Gal. 5:24; Col. 3:1-10; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:5; etc.)
- (1) This is the greatest drama of all: the old person dies, a new one in Christ comes to life.
- (2) **Christ victory on the cross comes to life once again at the altar in our church meetings. IF WE DO NOT SEE THIS, OUR ALTARS ARE NOT ALTARS AT ALL!!**
2. **The Altar is a Place Where We Meet God.**
- (a) We saw earlier that Jesus Christ’s sacrifice was in the perfect tabernacle ... that is not man-made.
- (1) This is another one of those mysterious terms: What is a tabernacle?
- (2) Is it a building like the “Gospel Tabernacle” complete with choir or what?
- (b) The term for Tabernacle in Hebrew is ***“mishkan”, “a residence.”***
- (1) For nomadic people like the Israelites, this meant a tent.
- (2) The first “residence” where the first altar was built under the Law of Moses was a tent which the Israelites carried during their years in the wilderness.
- (3) It was set up in various places during the time of the judges and ultimately in Jerusalem under David.
- (4) The temple that Solomon built was a successor of this tent.
- (5) The “Tabernacle,” in the middle of which was the altar, was in a simple way the place where God lived.
- (6) Mindful of God’s omnipresence, the Israelites understood the limitations of this concept: ***“But will God indeed dwell with men on earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built”*** (2 Chron. 6:18 NKJV).

D. God is Not Limited!!

1. Jesus complete sacrifice also freed us from the place that God “lived” being in one place. See John 4:21-24 . . . in essence God can be sought universally, not just one place. He is omnipresent (Psa. 139:7-10; etc.)
2. However, this should not blind us to the fact that there are special places where God is worshipped and in the altar of prayer God comes and lives!!
 - (a) This is a unique concept because, if we come to the Tabernacle, the place where God lives, we can meet with Him, sacrifice to Him what needs to be sacrificed, established (or re-establish) our right relationship with God through the sacrifice of His Own Son and have our needs met in Him (Phil. 4:19).
 - (b) **That is why the altar is such an important place in our churches.**
 - (1) Churches are routinely referred to as the “**house of God**,” and we think of this in terms of God “**owning**” our churches.
 - (2) But the altar, in its role as a tabernacle or tent, is the “**home of God**” where He lives and where we can meet Him!

Conclusion Point 1: “What is the Altar

1. We have seen that the altar is:
 - (a) The place of sacrifice.
 - (b) The place where we meet God
2. This is simple enough. But wait! There is one more thing we need to make our altars complete. It is a priest to preside over a sacrifice. Who might that be? This we will discuss next.

A PRIEST IS NEEDED!!**A. Looking for a Priest? LOOK IN THE MIRROR!!**

1. Altar services vary from church to church. After the message an invitation is given. Moved by the Holy Spirit people move forward and gather at the front of the church.
2. The preacher, aided in some cases by attendants who help keep things orderly, goes through the assembled crowd praying for people in succession, frequently rapid succession if there is a lot of people there and especially if a prayer line is formed. People shout, weep and may fall under the power of God
3. **“And they live happily ever after . . .” or do they?**
 - (a) Do we really know if they do or not?
 - (1) We certainly know that *The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. (1 Sam.16:7b)*
 - (2) But in many cases we do not stop to ask them what their need is, or whether it has been met, or whether they need anything further from God, or even if they are saved or lost.
 - Our anointed preacher does the job that God appointed him to do but he cannot do everything.

- **As a result of this, much of the move of God in our services and at our altar is wasted as people go away unsatisfied, unredeemed and unchanged!!**
- The solution is to have what we usually call **“Altar Workers.”**
 - **Who can be an altar worker?**
 - Views vary, for example some believe only credential ministers ought to be altar workers.
 - Few churches have sufficient credential ministers to effectively serve as Altar Workers.
 - The Word of God answers the question: “Who can be an altar worker?”
 - *It should be noted that New Hope somewhat differs from some other churches in regards to qualifications, etc. for their altar workers which we will repeat periodically for clarity.*

B. The Role of the Priest

1. The Hebrew word for priest for priest is *Kohen*, meaning “one officiating” (*One source spelt it as “koben” ... as used in my original notes but “Kohen” is more accurate*).
2. The role of the priest was to officiate sacrifice at the altar. *“Aaron and his descendants were the ones who presented offerings on the altar of burnt offering and on the altar of incense in connection with all that was done in the Most Holy Place, making atonement for Israel in accordance with all that Moses the servant of God had commanded” (1 Chron. 6:49 NIV).*
 - (a) Thus the priesthood in Israel was restricted to a relatively small group of people.
 - (b) Everyone else to go through them to have access to the sacrificial system and the atonement that could be obtained there.
3. This was not God’s original intent *“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. **And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.** These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.” (Exodus 19:5-6 NKJV).*
 - (a) **It was God’s desire for ALL people to be priest.**
 - (b) He expressed this desire even before He gave the Ten Commandment.
 - (c) God’s priests were to do three things (See Numbers 16:5-7)
 - (1) **Be set apart for God v. 5 . . . “... the LORD will show you who are His” NKJV**
 - (2) **Be holy v. 5 . . . “and who is holy” NKJV** (the man the LORD chooses will be one who is holy).
 - (3) **Draw near to God v. 5 . . . “come near to Him” NKJV** (the man the LORD chooses He will cause him to come near to Him).
4. The Israelites, however, lost the chance to have a broad-based priesthood.
 - (a) The first way they did this was by their fear: *“When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they*

trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die!’” (Exodus 20:18-19 NIV)

- (b) **They followed that up with their disobedience, for example in relation to the golden calf, etc.**
 - (c) So God sent them the next plan: **The Aaronic Priesthood.** (Example see Exodus 29).
5. To be a priest in Israel required that a man be a descendant of Aaron, but there were other qualifications as well.
 6. In **Leviticus 21** there is a long list of things that qualifies or disqualified a man from being a priest. (***You may also read Leviticus chapters 8-10; etc.***).
 - (a) He could not be the husband of a prostitute, divorced woman, or even a widow.
 - (b) He could not become ceremonially unclean except for a close relative (in cases of death, diseases, etc.), and he could not be physically disfigured or lame in any way.
 - (c) **Although many of these things seem harsh to us today, they were symbolic of holiness—the characteristics of being “set apart”—that God expected from those who would meet Him at the altar.**

C. Jesus Christ, The Great High Priest!

1. It is interesting to note that the first priest mentioned in the Old Testament was not a descendant of Aaron, not even an Israelite: *“Then melchizedek king of Salem brought out wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High Who delivered your enemies into your hand.’ And he gave him a tithe of everything.”* (Gen. 14:18-20 NKJV)
 - (a) Melchizedek is an important figure for us, because Jesus Christ, whose sacrifice was done in the tabernacle made by God Himself was in Melchizedek’s order.
 - (b) *“The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind: You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek”* (Psa. 110:4 NIV).
 - (c) *“... though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, ...”* (Heb. 5:8-10 NKJV).
2. **Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and victory on the cross ended the need for the Aaronic priesthood.**
 - (a) We now have free access to God . . . strictly because of Jesus Christ!! (Example see Heb. 4:14-16).
 - (b) **As a result, the universe of people who can be counted as “priests” can be expanded to all those who trust in Jesus Christ our Blessed Lord and Savior:** *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light”* (1 Peter 2:9 NIV)

D. Our Priesthood at the Altar.

1. All of this should make two things clear:
 - (a) The New Testament neither supports the idea of a small “**elite**” group to be ministers at the altar (and everywhere else too), nor was it God’s plan for such an “**elite**” group to exist in the first place as we noted in the Old Testament.

*(God **intended** for all His people to be His priests but He then had to resort to the Aaronic priesthood and such pattern continues today and yet **EVERY BELIEVER** has been called to be light of the world, salt of the earth His ambassadors!!)*
 - (b) In creating THE Church, which is “**the called out**” **people**” (Matt. 16:18;; 2 Cor. 6:17; 1 Thess. 4:7; 1 Peter 2:9; etc.), God intended that **all** should have a measure of His anointing and empowerment to do the work that He expected the Church to do.
2. Because Jesus Christ’s anointing sacrifice is complete for all sins, our ministry at the altar is not the same as it was with Aaron’s family: “*Now then, **we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.***” (2 Cor. 5:20 NKJV).
 - (a) We cannot take God’s place at the altar, but as Christ’s ambassadors we represent Him as we minister to those who wish to lay down their sacrifice at the altar.
 - (b) As is the case in so many other places, at the altar we are the only Bible some people read and the only Jesus Christ some people see . . . Oh Beloved . . . may it be more than a song to sing but prayerfully pray and PURSUE DAILY:

**“Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,
All His wonderful passion and purity,
O thou Spirit divine, ALL my nature refine,
Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.**
3. The message from all this is clear: **YOU can minister at the altar of God!!**
 - (a) **It was God’s intent for all His people to be ministers!!**
 - (b) **As a Christian YOU are God’s ministers and YOU can serve at His altar and at many other places in the body of Christ.**

Matthew 4:19 Amplified Bible

*“And He said to them, **Come after Me [as disciples—letting Me (Jesus Christ) be your guide], follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men!**”*

See also: Matt. 5:13-16; 28:16-20; Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:16-17; 2 Cor. 5:20-21; Eph. 4:7-16; 6:20; etc.

We will next look at the way in which you can and should be prepared for this important task. God richly Bless You!!

Eph. 6:7 NKJV

“... with goodwill doing service as to the Lord, and not to men, ...”

LESSON 1 REVIEW QUESTIONS

Please Note: Questions 11 through 15 are taken from “Lesson 1B: The Tabernacle”.

1. The Hebrew word for altar is *mizbeach*, which comes from slaughter. Give at least one Scriptural reference where this is used.

2. The Greek word for altar is *thusiasterion*; what does it mean?

3. As stated in our lesson, what two facts are revealed about the altar?

4. Why is it not necessary for us to offer animals on our altars?

5. What is the most important thing the seeking sinner needs to leave at the altar? Give Scriptural reference.

6. In reference to the sinner coming to the altar seeking God we refer to 2 Cor.5:17. What is meant by: “This is the greatest drama of all?” (As used in the lesson).

7. Why is the altar such an important place in our churches?

8. Why seekers, after going to the altar leave unsatisfied, unredeemed and unchanged?

9. What was the role of the priest during the Old Testament period?

10. What ended the need for the Aaronic Priesthood?

11. In regards to the Tabernacle:

- (a) What was the significance to the Israelites?
- (b) Where was it located during their encampment?

12. The Tabernacle had one entrance.

(a) Where was it located?

(b) Briefly explain its significance especially as it applies to the period of grace.

13. What two items were used in the Outer Court of the Tabernacle?

14. The Tabernacle had two sections, name them along with the contents in each section.

15. What was the most ornate furniture in the Tabernacle and what is the significance as it relates to Christ and all Christians?

Lesson 1 Answers for review questions

1. **Answer:**
Ge. 8:20; Ex. 17:51; 40:10; 1 Chron. 6:49; etc. Page 1

2. **Answer:**
A place of sacrifice. Page 1

3. **Answer:**
(a) It is a place of sacrifice.
(b) It is a place where we meet God. Page 1-3

4. **Answer:**
Because Christ provided for that, He was the ultimate sacrifice. Page 2

5. **Answer:**
He needs to leave the old nature of sin in exchange for a new life in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17)
Page 2

6. **Answer:**
The old person dies; a new one in Christ comes to life. Page 2

7. **Answer:**
The altar, in its role as the Tabernacle or Tent, is the “home of God” where He lives and where we can meet Him. Page 3

8. **Answer:**
(a) The preacher cannot do everything.
(b) We need to determine if the individual’s needs are met:
 (1) By counseling with them.
 (2) By effective follow-up.
(c) That is why we need Altar Workers. Page 3

9. **Answer:**
The priest’s role was to officiate sacrifice at the altar Page 4

10. **Answer:**
Jesus Christ sacrifice and the victory on the cross. Page 5

11. **Answer:**
(a) The dwelling place of the God of Israel.
(b) During encampment it was located in the center of the twelve tribes facing the east.
Page 1 ... Lesson 1 Part B: The Tabernacle.

12. Answer:

- (a) The gate was located at the center facing the east.
 - (b) There is only one way to God and that is through Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
- Page 3 ... Lesson 1 Part B: The Tabernacle.

13. Answer:

- (a) The Altar of Burnt Offering.
 - (b) The Laver.
- Page 3 ... Lesson 1 Part B: The Tabernacle.

14. Answer:

- (a) The Holy Place.
 - (1) The Table of Shew Bread.
 - (2) The Golden Candle Stick.
 - (3) The Altar of Incense.
 - (b) The Holies of Holies . . . contained the Ark of the Covenant with:
 - (1) The Two Tables of the Law.
 - (2) The Pot of Manna.
 - (3) The Rod of Aaron that Budded
- Page 3 ... Lesson 1B: The Tabernacle.

15. Answer:

- (a) The Most ornate of all the furniture was the Golden Candlestick.
 - (b) Many lessons . . . for example:
 - (1) It was the only light in the Tabernacle, without it the priest would be in darkness. Jesus is the light of the world in Him is no darkness (John 1:9; 8:12; 12:46; etc.).
 - (2) There was only one main shaft to which the branches are connected. Jesus is the vine we must be connected and remain in Him otherwise we can do nothing (John 15:15).
 - (3) We are to be lights in this dark world (Matt. 5:14-16)
 - (4) Etc.
- Page 4... Lesson 1B: The Tabernacle.

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