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Altars of Stone

When correctly understood, it will be noticed that the Bible repeats many things using different symbols, as well as various parables. For instance, figures of God's word are water and dew (Dt 32:1-2), fire and a hammer (Jer 23:29). By a variety symbols, different shades of meaning are revealed - i.e. Water cleanses (Eph 5:26; Jn 15:3), fire consumes (Dt 5:24-25; Jer 5:14) while a hammer pulverizes rocks/stones. Water exists as rain, rivers, sea, snow, dew and hail, all giving different shades of meaning. Every law, every experience of Israel can be viewed allegorically as containing spiritual lessons for the seeker of truth. (Examples: Gal 4:21-31; Jn 7:37-39; Mt 12:33-37; most of Mt 13). To learn requires a person to seek the Lord and search the scriptures, which the Pharisees did not do (Jn 5:39-40).

Every place where Abraham resided, he built an altar. While the Bible does not say, it can be reasonably assumed that he always used the natural stone. Moses, however, had specific instructions for building altars: **Ex 20:22-26:** *22. And the Lord said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. 23. Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. 24. An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. 25. And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. 26. Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.*

There are two altars mentioned that were ok to build. Putting these things inward, an altar is a symbol for the heart. **Jer 17:1:** *The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars;* "Heart" is parallel with "altars" in the verse, indicating that altar is a symbol. To build an altar of earth is to receive God's thoughts into one's mind, by sacrificing your own thoughts (Isa 55:7-8).

The "altar of stone" is a parallel and a bit more interesting. A stone is a spiritual concept (Mt 7:24; 16:18; 1Cor 10:4). We are not to hew the stones. The concept of the tool is expanded in **Dt 27:5:** *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.* Exodus 20:25 has the Hebrew word for "tool," while Deuteronomy has the Hebrew word for "iron," which can be taken to be an "iron tool" in both cases. Iron is a symbol for "strength, firmness," whether positive or negative. In this context, to shape a stone with an iron tool is saying allegorically that God warns us not to mix man's understanding with His spiritual concepts. To do so is to eat from the tree of good and evil - mixing our thoughts with God's. In Jeremiah 17:1, Judah's sin was written with a "pen of iron" - i.e. their hearts were inscribed firmly with their sins. *The strength of sin is the law* (1Cor 15:56), or man's interpretation of the law. We want to be inscribed with the Spirit of God (2Cor 3:3), and built up into a spiritual house, or God's understanding of the law; we want to be a stone "hewn" only by the Holy Spirit. **1Pet 2:5:** *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.* (Cp Eph 2:19-22)

Do not go up by steps unto mine altar lest your nakedness be revealed. In Leviticus 18 are laws about not exposing the nakedness of near kin. In today's spiritual application, "near kin" would be a brother or sister in Christ (cp Mt 12:48-50). Then, to expose their nakedness would be to tell others about some sin in their life. It is different if a person makes public a personal sin, perhaps to request prayer, or, as a part of their own testimony of having overcome. Otherwise, if we see something we are to keep it to ourselves or go directly to the person. Adam and Eve revealed their spiritual nakedness when they chose to eat from the wrong tree. Originally, they were naked and unashamed (Gen 2:25) - i.e. they did not know God by experience and had done nothing of which to be ashamed. After they ate from the forbidden tree, their conscience convicted them and they were ashamed and tried to cover their loins with fig leaves (Gen 3:7). When Jesus cursed the fig tree (Mt 21:19), it was a picture of how the Israel had withered spiritually. Again, it is written that when we see the leaves shoot forth of the fig tree (Mt 24:32-33), that is, when Israel accepts their Messiah, we know the end is upon us.

"Steps" are part of walking, and represent a spiritual path or an application of a spiritual concept. Here are some verses to consider:

Ps 56:13: *For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?* (Feet = direction of the heart, or thinking; light = spiritual truth)

Ps 37:23: *The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delights in his way.*

Pr 4:18: *But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day.* (The perfect day is the seventh day, a symbol of daily resting in Christ: not about keeping a particular day of the week)

Pr 5:5: *Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell [pit].* (a strange woman is an evil mind-set)

Jn 8:12: *Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.* (Darkness = lack of God's understanding)

We are not to approach the altar of the heart with a blemished sacrifice, that is, mix man's understanding with the pure truth of God. (Animals are symbols of thoughts, cp Ps 73:22) *O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps* (Jer 10:23). A collection of steps make a path, a journey, and represent a gathering of spiritual ideas that puts one on the narrow or the broad path of which we have been warned (Mt 7:13-14) that many will enter.

This idea of hewn stone can also be seen in the New Testament: **Mt 27:57-60:** *57. When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: 58. He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. 59. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60. And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed.*

Here is where we can glean spiritual lessons from an actual event. Joseph was an "honorable counselor," a man of integrity who probably held a high Jewish office (Mk 15:43), and who *had not consented to the counsel and deed of them* (Lk 23:50). John, also, adds some information: **Jn 19:38-39:** *38. ...Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews... 39. And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night...* Nicodemus was a "master" (instructor) in Israel (Jn 3:10).

Remember - THINK SPIRITUAL! Only Joseph was referred to as a “rich man,” but the term can be applied to both men spiritually. The negative of a rich man is one who thinks he understands God: **Pr 28:11:** *The rich man is wise in his own conceit...* **Jer 9:23:** *...let not the rich man glory in his riches: Jesus said: ...That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven (Mt 19:23).* The kingdom of heaven is the way God’s thinks, it is His righteousness. Both men were well known, wealthy Jews who, at the time, were not openly confessing Jesus. A similar situation that can applied today to leaders who know the church is teaching error but will not stand up to make it known.

Note also, at the request of church leaders, the stone was later sealed by Pilate and a Roman guard placed nearby: **Mt 27:62-66:** *62 Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, 63 Saying, Sir, we remember that, that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. 64 Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. 65 Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. 66 So they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.* After the resurrection, those same leaders bribed the soldiers to not tell anyone what had happened (Mt 28:11-15).

In Jesus’ day, the church leaders had Rome seal Jesus’ body in a hole of a rock and set a watch to guard it. Spiritually today, church leaders have done the same thing by sealing up the correct understanding of the Father, Son of God and the Holy Spirit. The reason for His sacrifice taught today is based on Roman doctrine. We have had handed down to us by church leaders beliefs obscured by hundreds of years of Roman. This teaching is like a great stone, or spiritual concept which covers the people’s understanding. A “heavenly messenger” (a person who has received the truth) is required to roll away the stone for those with ears to hear (Eze 12:2; Lk 8:8).

Summary: **Ezekiel 33:30-31:** *30. Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. 31. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness.* Judah, in Ezekiel’s day, literally went into Babylon. Today, it is spiritual Babylon (confusion about God) into which people go. Since God is not keeping a record of people’s sins (2Cor 5:19), then Jesus did not die so that we could be forgiven. He died to reveal the fact that the Father has always loved and desired us to be a part of His kingdom.

Blemishes and spots (2Pet 2:13) represent man’s perverted, twisted thinking about God, caused by sin. Without the full truth of the cross, one can never see the depth of the knowledge needed to remove the blemishes in their lives. The animal sacrifices are figures of slaying our “old man” (Eph 4:20-27) by means of seeing the cross so that we can be renewed in a spiritual mind (Eph 4:20-24). Stony ground (Mk 4:5-6, 16-17) is a figure of a person full of self’s own opinions. Anyone who has a willing heart and spiritual ears to hear, the Spirit of Christ will smash those stones with the “hammer of His word.”

1Jn 1:5-7: *5. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6. **If** we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 7. **But if** we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. Amen!*