

Study 0042

Scripture Text: Genesis 8:20-22

In our last study, we identified four major eras in the evolution of the worship of God by man as follows: (a) the pre-Flood era; (b) the post-Flood era; (c) the Law era; and (d) the Grace era. The first of these, the pre-Flood era, was investigated in our last study. In this study, we shall see how worship evolved after the Flood—the post-Flood era; that is, the period immediately after the Flood, but just before the giving of the Law to Moses in the wilderness.

Worship in the Post-Flood Era

Even though there were a few worshippers of God on earth in the pre-Flood era, the number of non-worshippers of God (essentially, evil men) was overwhelmingly much larger. Hence God decided to end the then world but spared Noah, a worshipper of God, who walked with, and was pleasing to God. The end of that world came with the great Flood which destroyed all living things including birds and animals, except those preserved in the ark which God had asked Noah to build. Although the rain and underground waters that brought the Flood of waters upon the earth was for no more than forty days, the flood waters remained on the earth for another one hundred and fifty days (**Genesis 7:17-24**), and it took an additional six months or so, for the flood waters to dry up completely from the earth (**Genesis 8:1-14**). Once the earth was completely dry of the Flood waters, it was time for all the creatures in the ark to be released unto the earth again, and this, Noah did (**Genesis 8:15-19**). However, not all the living creatures were released unto the earth, for our scripture text records that Noah took some of the clean beasts and clean fowls, and offered a burnt offering unto God on an altar he had built for that purpose.

Thus, we come across a new component in the worship of the One true God—the building of an altar on which offerings of ‘clean’ animals and fowls were burnt to God. The building of altars was especially common with those who were worshippers of God in the post-Flood era. Besides Noah, other post-Flood era worshippers who built altars unto God were, Abraham (**Genesis 12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9-14**), Isaac (**Genesis 26:22-25**), Jacob (**Genesis 33:20; 35:1-15**), and Moses (**Exodus 17:15**). Worship of God, in the form of bowing down is also characterized in this era (**Genesis 22:26-27, 48-52; Exodus 4:29-31**), as was worship under a planted tree (**Genesis 21:33**).

Altars became significant in this era, as something on which burnt offerings and sacrifices could be offered to God (**Genesis 8:20; 22:2, 13**). It also served as an instrument of man’s appreciation to God for His preservation and provision. Altars were also erected to commemorate major events in the lives of worshippers; like, the exit from the ark in the case of Noah (**Genesis 8:20**); the appearance of God in the case of Abraham (**Genesis 12:7**); or a variant of an altar, when Jacob set up a stone as a pillar to commemorate his encounter with God when he was fleeing from his brother Esau (**Genesis 28:22**)—this was perhaps because Jacob did not know God or how to worship Him, nor did he know anything about how to build altars. The purpose of erecting the pillar was served when he returned to the spot to erect an altar to God by divine instruction (**Genesis 35:1, 7**). Altars also played a major role as a place where worshippers could go to meet with God as clearly distinct from other areas of their habitat (**Genesis 12:8; 13:1-4, 18**). Altars were thus places where prayers were made to God by worshippers. With Abraham, altars seemed an integral part of his life, as well as being a form of establishing God’s presence in every place he dwelt in. Altars were not just erected as a place where men could call on the name of God (for prayers), but in some cases,

they were given names to commemorate certain occurrences in the lives or sojourn of the worshipper (**Genesis 22:14; 33:20; Exodus 17:15**).

A very significant occurrence in the post-Flood era was God's response to worship, especially after sacrifices were made to Him on altars erected in honour of His name. In **Genesis 8:21-22**, we are privy to God's response which was initially not known to Noah: God determined to lift the curse on the ground on account of man's sinfulness, He vowed never again to wipe out all of mankind with a flood, and that seasons will occur as they ought to. In **Genesis 9:1-17**, God then enters into a covenant with all of mankind through Noah and pronounced blessings upon Noah and his sons. In **Genesis 35:1-15**, God re-iterates His promise/covenant to bless Jacob and his descendants, after he erected the altar at Bethel.

For Christians today, an altar is not a physical monument erected on the ground; rather, it is God's presence in our hearts through the finished work of Christ. All we are called to do is to maintain this 'altar' in our lives, as we;

- (a) Worship God in gratitude for His salvation, preservation and provision, among other blessings He has bestowed upon us;
- (b) Remember God's faithfulness, deliverance, support, defence, etc., in our lives.;
- (c) Pray, praise, give thanks, and fellowship with God, on a daily basis; and,
- (d) Gather together with other believers in venues that have been consecrated by God as places where He wants to meet with His children on a regular basis (**Hebrews 10:25**).

When we keep God's presence in our lives, we not only expect to meet with God there, but we also expect to hear from Him! When we do not maintain or retain the presence of God in our hearts, we permit neglect and a breaking down of this 'altar' which gives opportunity for the erection of ungodly 'altars' unto strange gods, which is idolatry!

Before we leave off worship in the post-Flood era, let us bring to mind the fact that while Noah and a few others were erecting altars to God, certain men were erecting a tower which would reach up to heaven as a monument to themselves (**Genesis 11:1-9**). We observe that the tower these men built required synthetic material, whereas, God's altar was built with naturally available materials (**Exodus 20:24-25; Daniel 2:34, 45**). Secondly, man's tower was to reach to the heavens, whereas, God's altar was the place where God came to meet man, and was not to be raised high (**Exodus 20:26**). Thirdly, we observe that man's tower was to make a name for themselves, whereas, God's altar established God's name. Fourthly, man's tower was to unite men under men, whereas, God's altar was to unite the hearts of men under God's authority and leadership! The worship of the One True God must proceed out of grateful hearts, rather than out of slavish ones. One question you must ask yourself today is, "Am I building man's tower or am I maintaining God's altar?" That is, "Am I projecting my strength and prowess or am I permitting the presence of God in my life to keep increasing?" The song, "Sing Out" captures the essence of our worship in keeping the One True God in our hearts:

*Sing out, the Lord is near
Build Him a temple here
A palace of praise
A throne of thanksgiving
Made for the King of kings*

EXERCISE

Please state true or false to the statements below:

1. The altar of the post-Flood era can be likened to the churches being built today.
2. God's altar is built by God in the hearts of men today.
3. Worship must proceed from grateful hearts.
4. God's altar in our hearts is maintained through singing.
5. God's altar in our hearts is maintained as we remember God's faithfulness toward us.
6. God's altar in our hearts is maintained through prayer, praise, etc.
7. God's altar in our hearts is maintained through the attendance of programs.
8. We are called to honour God in our lives and with our lives.
9. If we don't maintain God's altar in our hearts, we enter into idolatry.
10. God's altar is built without hands; but man's tower needs man's ingenuity.
11. God's altar emphasizes humility and simplicity; man's tower emphasizes human ability and strength.
12. God's altar is recognition of God's authority over man; man's tower is man's authority over man.