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Make an Altar of Earth and Sacrifice on It
20: 22-26

Make an altar of earth and sacrifice on it DIG: How does 20:23 compare with 20:3-4? What can the one true God do that metal gods cannot? How will this come back to haunt the Israelites (see Gr – The Israelite's Sin of Idolatry)? Why only an altar of earth and not one of dressed stones? What does this say about the place where God is worshiped?

REFLECT: What have you sacrificed to ADONAI? Was it humble? Who knew about it? Do you have peace with God? What distracts you from meeting God? What can you do about it? When the Lord calls to you say, "Here I am, send me?" Or do you make excuses? What has to change? YHVH cannot tolerate sin. How can you be sinless and go to heaven? That's right. To have Messiah's sacrifice on the cross transferred to your spiritual bank account by faith. Then all the righteousness of Christ will be yours.

Then ADONAI said to Moses His servant: **Tell the Israelites this: You have seen for yourself that I have spoken to you from heaven (20:22). God** came down **from heaven, His** eternal dwelling place, to **the top of Mount Sinai (19:20)** in order to tell the **Jewish** people: **Do not make any gods to be alongside Me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold (20:23).** This statement was a reiteration of the first and second commandments. As a result, before giving **the Torah**, general principles were restated and elaborated on.

From inside the cloud, **ADONAI** told **Moses** that **the Israelites** could either make **an altar of earth or an altar of stones.** Altars were for the purpose of sacrifice. There was no **altar** in the Garden of Eden because **God** did not intend for them to break the Torah. **An altar** exists where sin flourishes and forgiveness is required. So it is not surprising that the same chapter that gave **the Israelites** specific instructions regarding the Torah also gave them specific instructions about **an altar**. It was an impossible standard and **God** made provision for when the people broke them. The **altar** would be a foreshadowing of **Messiah**, who would pay the ultimate price for our sin.

First **the LORD** said: **Make an altar of earth for Me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle.** The **earth,** which had been involved in the curse of sin, was to be renewed and glorified, not by sinful men, but by the glorious hand of **God**.[403] He said: **Whenever I cause My name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you (20:24).** The purpose of **burnt offerings** (**to see link click Fe – The Burnt Offering**) was to atone for sin, whereas the **fellowship offerings** (see **Fg – The Peace Offering**) gave **the people** an opportunity to enjoy communion with **God**.[404]

Isra'el was not to erect **an altar** in any place it might choose, but only in every place that **God** would bring **His** name to remembrance.[405] Throughout the book of **Genesis**, the patriarchs were allowed to build altars anywhere they wished. Where Abraham settled, he built **an altar**. Where Isaac settled he built **an altar** and where Jacob settled he built **an altar**. In fact, each patriarch built more than one altar in his various travels. That was not to be the case now with **the Torah**. The first place **God** would choose after they entered the Promised Land was in the city of Shiloh, in the territory of the tribe of Ephraim. That would be a temporary place, because later in the days of King David, **God** would choose a new place, the city of Jerusalem. From that point on, Tziyon was the place chosen by **God** where **He** would be remembered and **His altar** would be built.

Secondly, **God** required **a** humble **altar** for sacrifice. **He** stressed: **If you make an altar of stones for Me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it (20:25).** The moment a **tool** was put to **stones** made for **an altar**, it was polluted. **God** rejected it. The Canaanites and others made their altars with cut, finished **stones**. Alters with elaborate craftsmanship and elevated platforms with staircases were common in the worship of false gods.[406] **The Israelites** were not to be like them, so as not to be tempted into making idols.

God did not despise craftsmanship, as seen in the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. The

fit of the hewn **stones** there is still marveled at today. But here, **He** wanted it natural, not marred by man's works. **The altar** would be a place of faith, not works, once again pointing to **Jesus Christ, a rock not cut by human hands (Dani'el 2:34).**

But regardless, of weather they built **an altar** of earth or of **stones**, there was to be no sexual elements of **their** worship. Specifically, there were to be no **steps** associated with it, least **the nakedness** of the priest would be exposed. **ADONAI** said: **Do not go up to My altar on steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it (20:26).** Later, when **God** allowed **His people** to build stepped **altars (Leviticus 9:22; Ezeki'el 43:17),** Aaron and his descendents had already been instructed to wear linen underclothes **(Exodus 28:42-43; Leviticus 6:10, 16:3-4; Ezeki'el 44:17-18).**[407]

Haftarah Yitro: Yesha'yahu (Isaiah) 6:1-7:6, 9:6-7 (A), 6:1-13 (S)
(See my commentary on Deuteronomy, to see link click Af – Parashah)

When **ADONAI** called **Isaiah**, **the prophet** saw a vision of **YHVH sitting on His lofty throne (Isaiah 6:1)**. The **Temple** is filled with smoke, **the S'rafim were crying out to each other, "Holy, holy, holy!"** and **the doorposts shook at the sound of their shouting (Isaiah 6:2-4).** Then **Isaiah** heard the voice of **God** and said, **"Hear I am** (Hebrew: *hinneh*, meaning *behold*), **send me" (Isaiah 6:8-9)!** But the people are being hardened for judgment. The kings of **Syria** and **Isra'el** conspired against **Ahaz**, **king of Judah**, to remove **him** and install **the son of Tabeel** as a puppet government **(Isaiah 7:6)**. **Isaiah** took **his son, Shear-Jashub** (meaning *a remnant will return*), and told **Ahaz** to **stay calm and unafraid (Isaiah 7:4)**. The haftarah then skips ahead two chapters to announce that **the zeal of ADONAI-Tzva'ot** (the LORD of heaven's angelic armies) will guarantee a Davidic throne – Messiah will come (see the commentary on **Isaiah Cm – For Us a Child is Born**).

B'rit Chadashah suggested readings for Parashah Yitro: Mattityahu (Matthew) 5:5:20-30, 15:1-11, and 19:16-30; Mark 7:5-15, 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30; Acts 6:1-7; Romans 2:17-29, 7:7-12, 13:8-10; Ephesians 6:1-3; First Timothy 3:1-14; Second Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:5-9; Messianic Jews (Hebrews) 12:18-29; Ya'akov (James) 2:8-13 and First Kefa (Peter) 2:9-10

Some think it is silly that **ADONAI** could talk to **Isra'el** from a mountain top in Sinai. Here in Matthew, **Yeshua** speaks **His** famous Sermon on the Mount. Various groups receive favor

from **God**: **How bless are the pure in heart! for they will see God (Matthew 5:8).** Yet, **David** had already written: **The earth is ADONAI'd . . . Who may go up to the mountain of the ADONAI? . . . Those with clean hands and pure hearts (Psalm 24:1-4).** Another favored group, **the peacemakers . . . will be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9). Messiah,** the promised **Son** to sit on *David's throne*, is named *Sar Shalom*, or, **the Prince of Peace** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ck – He Will Be Called the Prince of Peace**). In the Sermon on the Mount, **the LORD** extends **His** offer made at Mount Sinai. The righteous and holy may draw near to **God**. They are even permitted to enter **the Kingdom of Heaven**. But standards are extremely high. Their **righteousness** must surpass **that of the Torah-teachers (Matthew 5:20)**. In other words, perfection.[408]