

RETOURNER À L'AUTEL

The story of the altar • from Eden to Carmel

Sixteen stages. Sixteen texts. Not one of them is ours.

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« Un seul autel. Beaucoup de chemins pour y revenir. »

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Act I · Before the word exists

The word "altar" does not appear until chapter 8 of Genesis. **But the blood flows from chapter 3 on.**

I · Eden, the altar you do not see, Genesis 3:21

Adam and Eve sewed leaves together; God throws them away. Then **"the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them."** A skin comes from an animal. **An animal died to cover their shame, and they are not the ones who killed it.**

That is Study 1, on the second page of the Bible. Man makes his own covering, and it does not hold. **God makes another one, at the cost of a life, and it is he who clothes them.**

RIGOR · read this before you preach it

The text says **neither "altar", nor "sacrifice", nor that God killed the animal.** It is an inference — an old one, a solid one, but an inference. **Say "an animal died", not "God offered a sacrifice". Ellen White, for her part, goes further:** she describes Adam offering the first lamb himself. **If you use that, cite her, and never Genesis.** Do not mix the two sources in the same sentence.

II · Two offerings, only one accepted, Genesis 4:3-5 · Hebrews 11:4

Cain brings fruit of the ground. Abel brings **the firstborn of his flock.** Hebrews 11:4: **"By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain."**

Ellen White · Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter "Cain and Abel", p. 72 "Abel grasped the great principles of redemption. He saw himself a sinner... He brought the slain victim, the sacrificed life... Through the shed blood he looked to the future sacrifice, Christ dying on the cross of Calvary." Abel is not performing a rite. He is looking through the blood, and he sees the cross.

(The word "altar" is still not there. But an offering is "brought": so there is a place. And when Cain is driven out, he goes "away from the presence of the LORD", Genesis 4:16. So there was a presence to stand before.)

III · Job, the first family altar, Job 1:5

"he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings **according to the number of them all.** For Job said, **'It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.'** Thus Job did **continually.**"

A father. **Every morning**. A sacrifice **for each child**. For a sin he has not seen, that he does not know, **that he supposes**. And "continually": **it is not the mood of the moment that decides**.

"Job as a loyal priest. ... He trembled lest his sons and daughters had displeased God during their festivities. **As a faithful priest of the household, he offered sacrifices for them individually.** He knew the offensive character of sin, and the thought that his children might forget the divine claims led him to God as an intercessor in their behalf." — *SDA Bible Commentary*, **Job 1:5** (original source: *The Review and Herald*, August 30, 1881) **VERIFIED · SDA Bible Commentary on Job 1:5, from The Review and Herald, August 30, 1881.** This is NOT from "Sons and Daughters of God".

RIGOR · The book of Job gives no date. It knows nothing of Israel, the Law, the priests or the temple: **it is the father who offers, himself.** Say "**the internal evidence places him in the patriarchal era**", not "Job lived in the time of Abraham".

The family altar comes a thousand years before the temple, and it will outlive it.

Act II · The word appears, and the altar follows the tent

IV · Noah, and he is a survivor, Genesis 8:20

First occurrence of the word "altar" in the Bible. Not in a temple, not in the mouth of a priest: **in the hands of a man who has just escaped death.**

The order will never change again: you are saved first, you build the altar afterward.

V · Abram, the altar follows the tent, Genesis 12:7-8

No temple. A tent, and a man on the move. **And everywhere he pitches his tent, he builds an altar.**

A home and an altar. That is all. There is no building in this story. **There are only households.**

VI · The first "back to the altar" in the Bible, Genesis 13:4

Abram goes down to Egypt, he lies about his wife, he comes out rich and dirty. And he goes back up **to the exact place where he had built the first altar**: "to the place where he had made an altar at the first. **And there Abram called upon the name of the LORD.**"

The name of this ministry is a verse. And the first return to the altar is **the return of a man who has just failed**. He does not build a new altar: **he comes back to the first one.**

VII · The question that will stay open for two thousand years, Genesis 22:7-9

Isaac carries the wood: "**Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?**" Abraham: "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."

RIGOR · In verse 13, what God gives is not a lamb: **it is a ram**. Isaac's question **is not answered in Genesis**. It waits for **John 1:29**. **Never shorten that road**: it is precisely because it stays open for two thousand years that it breaks you open.

VIII · God himself commands the return to the altar, Genesis 35:1-4

"Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. **Make an altar there** to the God who appeared to you **when you fled from your brother Esau**." And before going up, Jacob says to his household: "**Put away the foreign gods that are among you**", and he buries them.

Second return to the altar, and this time it is God who commands it. You come back to the place of the first altar, **and you first bury what had replaced it**. That is the procedure of the yes, in three verses.

Act III · The Law gives only two rules

Exodus 20:25 · Leviticus 6:12-13

No tool: "if you wield your tool on it you profane it". The stone goes into the wall **as it is**. **The fire does not go out**: "Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out."

The whole theology of this journey is held in those two rules. You do not touch up the man before you take him. **And you do not let the fire go out**.

RIGOR · Leviticus 6:12-13 in the English versification corresponds to **6:5-6** in Bibles that follow the Hebrew numbering. **Check it in your own edition**.

Act IV · The decline, in four stages

It is not what you think. Nobody walks into a house in order to tear the altar down.

IX · Convenience, 1 Kings 12:28-33

Jeroboam **tears down no altar**. He makes one that is closer. Two golden calves, Bethel and Dan, and the most dangerous sentence in the book: "**You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough**." Then he invents a feast, and he appoints priests who are not Levites.

That is how an altar dies in a house. No one decides to put it out. **It gets replaced by something shorter, more convenient, closer to hand**. And one day, it is gone.

X · Substitution, 1 Kings 16:30-33

Ahab marries Jezebel, and **he builds a house for Baal, and he erects an altar in it**.

Putting it out is not enough. Something else has to be lit. The heart will not accept a void: whatever is not given to God is given to another.

XI · Demolition, 1 Kings 18:4 · 19:10

Jezebel wipes out the prophets. Elijah will say: "[They have] **thrown down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword.**"

XII · And all that is left is stones on the ground, 1 Kings 18:30

"**And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down.**" The text does not say that Elijah *built* an altar. **It says that he repaired it.** The stones were there. They had always been there. **No one had picked them up.**

That is the state of most of the houses you are going to visit. The altar has not disappeared. **It is on the ground, and everyone walks past it without seeing it.**

Act V · The rebuilding

XIII · Twelve stones for a unity that no longer exists, 1 Kings 18:31-32

The kingdom has been split in two for generations. **There are no longer twelve united tribes, and Elijah takes twelve anyway.**

He does not build on what he sees. He builds on what God has promised.

XIV · And he drowns his own altar, 1 Kings 18:33-35

The wood. The victim, cut in pieces. Then **water three times**, until the trench overflows.

No one will be able to say the fire came from somewhere else. Do not hide the difficulties of the person you are walking with: **pour the water. God's fire is not afraid of water.**

XV · The fire falls, and look carefully where, 1 Kings 18:38-39

Fire does not fall on bare stones. It falls on an altar where an offering has been laid.

RIGOR · Never say "the fire does not fall on the stones". **1 Kings 18:38 says the opposite:** *"Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench."* **The stones were consumed along with the offering.** What is true, and verifiable: **fire does not fall on bare stones.** Without an offering, there is nothing. And the people then say exactly what the prophet's name had been saying from the beginning: **"The LORD, he is God."**, *Eliyahu.*

XVI · And the altar does not stop at Carmel

It passes through the cross, "**Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**" (John 1:29), **the answer to Isaac's question**, and then it comes back down to where it was born: **into a house**.

"you yourselves like **living stones** are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:5) **Ellen White · *The Adventist Home*** "The father is in one sense **the priest of the household**, laying upon the altar of God **the morning and evening sacrifice**."

From Eden to you, the altar has never moved. It has always been in somebody's home.