

# Enter at Your Own Rest

## Studies in the Book of Joshua

*"Full blessing in the Christian life is not bestowed except to eager, hungry people who press in to receive it"*

*Alan Redpath*

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### Text

Joshua 8:30-35

### Topic

The Israelites go to Shechem, build an altar, then interact with the Word of God as it is read publically

### Title

*"Altar-ed Ego"*

**Joshua 8:30** Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal, **Joshua 8:31** as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: "an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron *tool*." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings.

**Joshua 8:32** And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.

**Joshua 8:33** Then all Israel, with their elders and officers and judges, stood on either side of the ark before the priests, the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, the stranger as well as he who was born among them. Half of them *were* in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded before, that they should bless the people of Israel.

**Joshua 8:34** And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law.

**Joshua 8:35** There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, with the women, the little ones, and the strangers who were living among them.

## Introduction

The Israelites put the conquest of the Promised Land on hold for a few days and went on a retreat. It was something Moses had commanded them to do once they entered the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 27).

Their retreat had two main sessions:

1. The first was to build an **altar** and offering sacrifices upon it to the Lord.
2. The second was to read the Law of God aloud and respond to it. It isn't mentioned in our text but in Deuteronomy you read that over-and-over as the Law was read **all the people shall say Amen!**

**Altar** and **Amen!** Powerful words that may have lost some of their significance for us:

- We don't sacrifice on altars.
- Our use of **Amen!** is often restricted to an indicator that prayer-time is over.

There is more to these words – a lot more. Both **altar** and **Amen!** have their place in our lives as New Testament believers.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Stay On The Altar And Present Yourself A Living Sacrifice, and #2 Say "Amen!" And Purposefully Live-Out Your Sacrifice.

#1 Stay On The Altar  
And Present Yourself A Living Sacrifice  
(v30-31)

The Israelites journeyed for at least two days covering about thirty miles to get to the valley between the two mounts. The ground there

was called Shechem. It was and would go on to be rich in spiritual history:

- It was there God first promised the land to Abraham.
- It was the site of Jacob's well.
- In New Testament times it was where Jesus spoke to the woman of Samaria.

As I indicated in the introduction, Moses had commanded the Israelites to go there and conduct this retreat. The first order of business was to build a temporary altar for sacrifice.

**Joshua 8:30** Now Joshua built an altar to the LORD God of Israel in Mount Ebal, **Joshua 8:31** as Moses the servant of the LORD had commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the Book of the Law of Moses: "an altar of whole stones over which no man has wielded an iron *tool*." And they offered on it burnt offerings to the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings.

Back in Exodus 20:25 the Lord had instructed them to build these types of altars without using tools. Why? The altar was the place of sacrifice for sin and no human work was to be associated with it lest sinners think their own works can contribute to saving them.

Your salvation is a gift from God. It is by His grace and received by faith.

God had prescribed many different types of offerings. At this retreat He specifically asked for **burnt offerings** and **peace offerings**.

When making a **burnt offering** the offerer laid his hands upon the animal identifying with it. The animal died in his place. It was totally consumed on the altar.

The **burnt offering** looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ. He would die in our place and, by receiving Him as Savior, we identify with Him in His once-for-all sacrifice on our behalf.

The **peace offering** is also called the fellowship offering. One of its unique features was that it was not entirely consumed. Instead a meal was associated with it.

The **burnt offering** took care of God's wrath against sin. The **peace offering** aspect of Christ's work went beyond this. Because of Jesus God is no longer angry with the one who has identified with Him by faith. We are at peace with God and can enjoy intimate fellowship with Him.

That's why there was a meal associated with the **peace offering**. Meals were extremely important in the Bible, signifying the joy of connection and relationship. You therefore see why this offering was also called the fellowship offering because it brought God and man into a meal, into a real fellowship, with one another.

The Israelites had literal altars and offered actual sacrifices upon them. We see the symbolism and the significance and rejoice in our spiritual perception.

**But we are never to think we are done with the altar!** One of the most powerful passages in all the New Testament places you on an altar. After eleven chapters of letting you know just how much God has accomplished for you through Jesus, the apostle Paul begins his application to your Christian walk by saying (in Romans 12:1),

**Romans 12:1** I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.

**Present** is a technical word that is used for the priest's presenting an offering in the Temple on the altar. We're done with the literal Temple and its altar but there is an important spiritual application. This presenting is something we are still called upon to do.

You are to **present** your body as a **living sacrifice**. In other words, **you are to see yourself as constantly upon an altar.**

You and I are to see ourselves as if we lived on an altar. Like the burnt offering we are to be totally consumed for God and like the peace offering we are to be aware of our intimate fellowship with Him. It has often been said that the problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps wriggling off the altar! We need to stay there, to stay put, as it were.

What gets us off of the altar? Think of how we popularly use the term “altar.” We talk about people worshipping at various ‘altars,’ e.g., the altar of self. We recognize that there are people and possessions that take God’s rightful place in our lives.

Here is another application. In the Old Testament the worshipper came with his or her sacrifice. It required thoughtful preparation. There was a cost involved. There was participation.

Stay on the altar. Be more-and-more consumed by God. Get more-and-more in fellowship with God. Thoughtfully prepare. Let it cost you time, treasure, and talent. Be a vital participant.

Today, if you’re not careful, you can come as a worshipper with an entirely different – and entirely incorrect – perception of worship. You can come as a consumer rather than a participant, looking for what you can get rather than what it might cost.

Stay on the altar. Be more-and-more consumed by God. Get more-and-more in fellowship with God. Thoughtfully prepare. Let it cost you time, treasure, and talent. Be a vital participant.

On a practical level that means you may need to go on a retreat. It doesn’t need to be a one-day conference or a weekend. Those have their valuable place in your walk. I’m talking about going on a **daily**

**retreat** – perhaps even several times a day. Learn to sense when you’ve wriggled off the altar seeking your will and your way rather than God’s. Then get back on it – offering all of yourself and enjoying His fellowship as you do.

There was a second ‘session’ to the Israelite’s retreat at Shechem.

#2 Say “Amen!”  
And Purposefully Live-Out Your Sacrifice  
(v32-35)

In their retreat syllabus the Israelites were told to plaster the altar so God’s Law could be written on it. Then they were to divide into tribes for a responsive reading of God’s Law.

**Joshua 8:32** And there, in the presence of the children of Israel, he wrote on the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written.

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I’m told that the geography creates a natural amphitheater so that you can be heard speaking from mount-to-mountain and in the valley below.

As they began to possess the Promised Land the people were reminded that their enjoyment of it depended upon obedience to the Law of God. Obey it and they would be abundantly blessed. Disobey it and they would bring curses upon themselves.

One commentator quipped that the Israelites could choose one of two spiritual addresses in the Promised Land. They could live at Mount Gerizim and be blessed. Or they could live at Mount Ebal and be cursed.

There is a sense in which this still applies to us. As New Testament believers, we are no longer under the death sentence of disobedience to God's Law. The Law cannot condemn us because Jesus Christ kept it on our behalf.

But, as Alan Redpath points out in his commentary on Joshua, though we have been delivered from the sentence of God's Law we have not been released from its standards. Instead we are expected to fulfill the Law as the love of God is shed in our hearts by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We now love what God loves and hate what God hates. We now act and react as Jesus would because we are filled with His Spirit.

When Moses described this retreat (in Deuteronomy) you read that **all the people shall say Amen!** Not just once but over-and-over as the Law was read.

**They weren't getting Pentecostal!** **Amen!** is a strong word meaning *so be it!* It is a word of commitment. When I say Amen! I am agreeing with the value and virtue of what is being said and I am committing myself to it.

We have the indwelling Holy Spirit who empowers us to keep God's Law and fulfill the commandments not as a duty but as a delight. Thus we read God's Word and purposefully determine to say **Amen!** to everything we find in it. Our obedience empowered by the Holy Spirit is how we live-out our commitment to being living sacrifices.

Is there something, some issue, that God has been dealing with in your life? Say Amen! to it. Agree with God. Commit to yielding yourself to the Holy Spirit.

Responsive reading is something congregations sometimes do in their services. A facilitator reads a portion of Scripture then the people read a portion. Or there is a reading followed by some other responsive phrase or phrases.

The word **Amen!** in our context today reminds me that my walk with the Lord is one continuous responsive reading. I read; I respond by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

To obey is better than mere sacrifice. But if I am the sacrifice, and I obey, that is better yet!

A Christian who is on the **altar** and who purposes to say **Amen!** to God is a victorious Christian.

