



THE EFFECT OF THE ALTAR FIRE ON THE RELIGION OF ANCIENT ISREAL

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Abstract

This research paper examines the effect of the altar fire on the religion of ancient Israel. The paper examines the etymology, origin and history of altar to the people of ancient Israel. Yahweism was a National religion of the descendants of Prophet Abraham; their religion was the greatest and most powerful institution in ancient Israel. The altar was the center of the religious practices and a symbol of the presence of Yahweh (God) apart from the Ark of covenant among the Israelites. Hence the altar, its significance, the fire and functions coupled with various manifestations in the Old Testament its physical and supernatural power have been identified. The concept of fire on the altar at burnt offering, its economic and spiritual implication coupled with duties of the priests at the altar sacrifice have been considered in this paper. In the ancient history, the non- presence of altar fire at sacrifice was regarded as an abomination to Yahweh. The paper identifies the altars of the present Christian church as the altar of the heart, and the ultimate sacrifice made “once for all” by our lord Jesus on the cross. The New Testament concept of the altar fire has been interpreted as the power of the Holy Spirit (comforter) and its fire. The Levitical emphasis that the altar fire should ‘not go out’ remains valid; therefore, this paper recommends strongly that the fire on the altar in the Old Testament should be our heart fire that should never go out if we are to sustain a good, sincere relationship with God.

Keyword: Altar Fire, Yahweh, Holy Spirit, Our Heart, Sacrifice and Burnt Offerings.

Introduction

David (1989) gives a precise definition of what Altar and altar fire is. According to him, Altar and Altar fire are basic concepts in religious sacrifices not only in the Ancient Hebrew religion but also in many ancient religions. Sacrifice is the heart of

religious activities while the altar is the central location of religious sacrifice, where sacrifices are meant to be offered; it is done mainly on the altar by an action of fire. Religion is probably as old as man's existence and it is mostly seen not as the result of human investigation, but being the result of an extraordinary communication with the divine, not a product of reason merely, nor anything which originated from human inquiry and study but a result of a divine revelation.

John (1987) states that worship as an integral part of religion is an attitude of sacrifice. Sacrifice is a gift offered by an inferior being to a Superior Being. It is a tribute paid by the dependent being to his Lord (Superior Being), or an offering to a deity. It could be an offering with or without blood. The word sacrifice basically means to forfeit something for personal or corporate reason. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defined the word sacrifice as an act of giving up important or valuable to you in order to get that which seems more important. In this regard, sacrifice will be looked into as giving away of some worth for some specific reasons. David (1989) further explained that the concept of sacrifice permeates every religion; it is the giving away of something to a supreme Being, a deity or to a fellow human being on behalf of the Supreme Being with the belief of an expectation of something else or appeasement to deity.

David (1989) opined that Yahweism is the worship of the God of Israel by the ancient Hebrews and Israelites. Yahweism is a term used to refer to the worship of one God, Almighty, Sovereign, Eternal creator, etc. This term describes the monotheistic belief or worship of the ancient Hebrew patriarch as recorded in Tanakh. Tenakh contains a written history of the ancient Hebrews chosen Israelite descendants.

Barnes (1996) commented on the gradual development of Israel's sacrificial system as it relates to the practice of Job to that of Prophet Abraham. In both eras no priest was appointed for the office, no temple, tabernacle or sacred place was built of any kind, neither was there a consecrated altar. This kind prevailed in the patriarchal days except the altar erected by Noah, Isaac, Jacob etc. Thus, the functions of the father of a family became duties of consecrated priests who laid victim or their request on the altar before God. (cf Job 1: 4 -5. 42: 8.)

Wesley (1997) commented on the fire coming down from heaven at sacrifice must be perpetually preserved and not suffered to go out because it is a sign of acceptance of the sacrifice offered to Supreme Being or deity which he termed 'Divine mercy'. The daily burnt offering in Exodus 29:38-42, Number 28:13 were supposed to be daily maintained and sustained. To avoid the danger of the fire going out, Yahweh gave a strict command to constantly and diligently keeps the altar fire burning.

Keeping the law of altar fire burning must be on daily basis morning and evening sacrifices must be offered. (Clark, 1996). This law of keeping the fire ever burning was prominent among the Hebrews and later was imitated by the ancient Persian Magi with all the descendants of Parsees which continued till date. Faussets (1998) explained further the beginning of the fire and the responsibilities of kindling the altar fire which God bestowed on the priestly lineage of Aaron. The heavenly fire in Leviticus 9:24 did not kindle but consumed the victim which prompted the people to fall on their faces and worship God.

Law (1887) opined that the fire which came from heaven was the seal of heaven on the atoning rite. The fire came for justice on the guilty sons of men whom he assents as follows: the flame with blazing tongue proclaims; “here is the sacrifice which God selects, approves, calls men to bring and never will refuse”. This fire speaks of God’s divine acceptance. Abe (2008) explains the duties of priests to include the offering of sacrifice (as contained in Yahweism) as burnt offering, peace offering constant lighting of the lamp in the Tabernacle, keeping of the sacred fire always burning, etc., were among other several duties God allotted to them to perform. In Abel’s (2004) assertion, the sign of Yahweh’s acceptance of burnt offering was whether the flame of the fire rose towards heaven or not, the smoke of the sacrifice was vital and noticed more than the fire itself, the smoke was the share of God in the sacrifice which he termed ‘sweet savor’ Genesis 8:21, Exodus 29:18.

Etymology, Origin and History of Altar among the Hebrews

An altar is a raised ceremonial, typically flat-topped structure or an area where religious ceremonies are performed. It is a surface or structure upon which a religious sacrifice is offered. Altar and sacrifice are connected; though in some areas sacrifices are not necessarily offered on any altar. It is common to many cultures but not universal. Among world religions, Islam seems to be the only religion without the use of altar. Altar structure could be composed of either mound of earth, heap of stones, large slab of stone, wood or metal or a trench dug in the ground.

History of Altar among the Hebrews

The first recorded offering of sacrifice in the Bible is that of Cain and Abel. Though a traceable fact shows that Adam offered sacrifice to God as the author and dispenser of all the bounties of nature, giving thanks and sacrifices to justice and holiness, implying a conviction of his own sinfulness, confession, transgression and faith in the promised deliverer.

David (1989) asserts that Minchah is the offering which was offered by both Cain and Abel and by its nature it was offered on altar. There is no doubt that Adam, Cain and Abel offered sacrifice unto God and it was carried out on an altar. Evidence from the Bible proved that sacrifices were offered by Noah long before the flood by the Antediluvian patriarchs but the first mention of altar in the scripture was when Noah left the ark. Strong (1967) wrote to say according to a rabbinical legend, it was partly from the remains of one built altar by Adam on his expulsion from paradise, and afterward was used by Cain and Abel on the identical spot where Abraham prepared to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice.

In Genesis 8:20, Prophet Noah erected an altar and upon it, he offered a thanksgiving sacrifice of appreciation to Yahweh who then vowed not to annihilate mankind totally again from the surface of the earth despite the evil in the hearts of men.

Parker (2003) argued that several altars recorded in Genesis appeared in connection with the patriarch Abraham and his wandering. Shechem was the first place and the altar recorded served as a symbol of his possession of the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:7-9). Here Prophet Abraham called upon the name of the Lord God at the altar between Bethel and Hai. The last altar built by Abraham was on the top of a mountain in the land of Moriah where Abraham was supposed to offer Isaac as a sacrifice to God (Genesis 22:9). Isaac made use of this altar, added to what Abraham had built at Beersheba (Genesis 26:23-25). Jacob also built altar unto the Lord God where he did offer sacrifice to God; Genesis 33:20, 35:1-3).

In his submission, Parker (2003) explained that the Hebrew word for altar means a place of slaughter or sacrifice, but the altars of the old testament were not restricted to offering of animal as sacrifice, it was used as a reminder to the Israelites of their divine heritage, call to attention to a major event in their lives, or it sometimes served as a place of refuge when difficulties/hardship arose, or on oath taking. (Joshua 22:26-29).

In a related study, Clark (1996) stated that among the Hebrews, an altar built not for sacrifice unto God or the service of worship to God is a false altar. False altars were found among the people of Israel and Judah. Several kings in the history of Israel and Judah built series of altars for idol worship especially on the account of intermarriage with non-Israelites. These altars were totally condemned by Prophets of Yahweh (Amos 3:14, Hosea 8:11), a case of study in respect of Yahweh's condemnation of altars built was Jeroboam's sin (1Kings 12:28-33) which led the Israelites to apostasy.

The Place of Altar in some Ancient World Religions

According to Wright (1997), the word altar is from the Latin word ALTUS which simply means high elevation, hence altar in the early ages was originally a simple elevation made of earth, rough stones or turf. Altars in constant use were generally

made of stones, though there might be of other materials; thus in Greece, several altars were built of ashes of burnt offerings as that of Zeus at Olympia and Delos made of goat horns. The probability is that some of these ancient monuments were of unhewn stones thought to be Druidical remains that were derived from altars of primitive times as cromlechs in a form of a table of one large stone in a horizontal position under the support of other stones.

In the view of Unger (1957) another form of altar is a heap of stones with a large flat stone placed upon its top. Many of these cairns still remain today. Generally heathen altars faced the East, standing one behind the other; images of the gods (deity) they represent are placed on them, names and appropriate symbols are also carved upon them. Therefore, in our findings, three forms of altars in the ancient Roman empire which still remain today are (1) the higher of the celestial god (deity) called altera (2) the lower for the terrestrial deities called arae (3) a sort of table on which sacrificial utensils are placed called anclabries or enclabris. In the opinion of Washley (1960), there is also "mensasacra," a table on which incense and offering not for burnt offerings are placed. Some of these altars as well as their temples were also dedicated to more than one god (deity) some, to all the deities.

In African Traditional Religion, the place of altar is not too prominent, sacred places like grooves are shrines are made use of. Although, sacrifice and oblation are vital to the practice in African belief, yet only in a few instances are altars on elevated platform used for sacrifice.

Types and Significance of Altar in Yahwism

In the temple, two basic altars are erected, while sometimes the third is a raised platform which could be regarded as an altar, they are: the altar of burnt offering, the altar of incense offering and the table of showbread. Abe (2004) highlighted the description of Altar as follows:

- i. Altar of burnt offering:- It is called the brazen altar, carved from shittim wood, covered with brass plate about 7ft 6ins in height with four horns or elevated to four corners, portable, had rings and staves for bearing. It is placed in the court before the tabernacle towards the east and the interior is hollow. The furniture of the altar is brass which consists of a pan to receive the ashes that fell through the gratin, a shovel basin to contain the blood with which the altar is sprinkled. (Exodus 27:1-10, 28:43, 29:12.)
- ii. Altar of incense offering:- A small table of shittim wood covered with plates of gold about 18inch sq 3ft high, with four horns at four corners, two rings on each side

into which staves will be inserted for the purpose of carrying. It stood in the Holy place between the golden candlestick, between the veil and the outer sanctuary. The priest burns incense upon the altar every morning and evening (Exodus 30:1-20, 37:25, Psalm 141:2.)

iii. The table of showbread: - It is a piece of furniture by the holy table which can also be reformed to as altar. Abe (2004) argued that scholars had differences and similarities with the record presentation Zedokites vis-a-vis prophet Ezekiel's vision as it seemed the table of showbread and alter of burnt offering were not differentiated.

Altars were erected for memorials; apart from the spiritual significance, some altars are erected to commemorate some tangible manifestation of the divine e.g. Joshua erected an altar using twelve stones to symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel when the Israelites crossed river (Jordan. Joshua 4:8-11.)

The Concept of Fire in Yahweism Fire

Fire is a substance that is generated from the combustion of wool, coal, wood or petroleum to cause light and flames. Fire burns and produces blaze, that is light, heat and flame, a collection of materials such as logs or coal that is set alight for heating, cooking or burning is fire, or a reaction involving fuel and oxygen that produce heat and light. Fire is used to cook food, warm human body and frighten away predators. Fire is also used to provide light, make tools for weapons in times of war and for worship. This assertion was explained in detail in the interpreter Dictionary of the Bible (1985).

To keep fire burning and controlled in the early times was an essential part of the communal fire of man because starting a fire especially in adverse weather was a difficult task; to ignite fire, labour and time are needed. Therefore, human beings would not let the fire go out. Today, the focus is not anymore on starting fire but using it and also keeping out unwanted fire, knowing full well that it could be destructive. Apart from cooking and keeping the body warm, industries used it to fuel their power plant that produces electricity. Natural fire by volcanoes and lightening can be very destructive while human carelessness can also destroy wild life and landscape.

Fire in Ancient Religion

In further accurate presentation, David (1989) and Abe (2004) discussed that, in early religion, fire was essentially included as part of the ritual in worship. This is

revealed in some myths, e.g. the story of Vesta, a Roman goddess of health. To honour Vesta the high priest of the Roman religion periodically chose six priestesses called vesta virgins whose duties are to keep the fire going in a community health. The Holy Bible does not explain the invention of fire, a little is known in history about it. According to John (1967) in the Greek mythology, “Prometheus stole fire from Olympus when Zeus denied it to immortal beings and was chained to a rock in the wilderness of Scythe”. Fire had been an object of worship form earliest times among men hence the Israelites were warned against these strange and abominable practice which was pronounced among the Canaanites (Lev: 18:21, Deut: 12:31). In fire worship, there is devotion to fire as a divine or sacred element. Sinclair (1998) commented that fire, like the sun should not be extinguished; the flame itself may be the object of adoration or regarded as the manifestation of a divinity or fire spirit. The Thompson Chain Reference Bible (1998) stated that Zoroastrianism in ancient Asia regards fire as a pure creation and this fire became the symbol of Zoroastrianism as much as the cross is the symbol of Christianity.

Spiritual Implication of Burnt Offering

In making burnt offering, some major practices are observed by Israelites and these include what we shall examine in this paper:

- * The worshipper brings his offering to the place of sacrifice
- * He lays his hands (or hand) upon the victim and possibly to confess sins committed or state the purpose. This is usually in connection with the sacrificial lamb or the scapegoat where the blood will not be shed or guilt offering (Numbers 5:7).
- * The slaughtering is performed by the worshippers except for the national offering which is done by the priest. (Lev. 6:11).
- * The burning is carried out by the priest; a portion of the sacrifice is eaten by the priest, sometimes with the entire worshippers.

At the sacrifice, the smoke from the burning, the sprinkled blood, the ashes and the remaining carcass of the victim sacrificed necessarily would constitute environmental health challenge to the people. However, the instructions given to the priest on the maintenance of the altar, the cleanliness and purity associated with the priestly function shows that God left no reason for dirtiness or unkempt environment, either around the tabernacle or temple. Before the sacrificial animal is burnt, it will be cut into pieces to ensure that both inwardly and outwardly are without blemish.

The Effect of the Altar Fire

The altar fire is the symbol of Yahweh's continual divine presence among the people of Israel. Man's activities in the continuation of God's divine creative act and bringing into reality are part of Yahweh's divine instructions passed unto man. The sacrifice of Abel was a way of making Yahweh happy and pleased as the sacrifice offered was made by fire whose aroma was pleasing to the Lord. In today's Christendom, priest serving the altar who has not witnessed the altar fire remains cold spiritually since the spiritual control the physical human, coldness may permeate the person's entire situation.

1. The Role of Fire

We were created to worship God and have communion with him. God must be present in us for us to worship him. There are times we struggle with loneliness, burdened with despair, riddled with sin and overwhelmed by problems; when our fellowship with him is broken, then we need restoration. Constant communication with God is the essence of worship, to give us peace. So what is the role of fire in ancient Israel worship? The Old Testament book of Leviticus is God's worship manual to the Israelites.

- a. Aaron and his two sons, Nadab and Abihu, had been ordained as priests to lead Israel in worship – Leviticus 8.
- b. In chapter 9, the two began their ministry sacrificing various unblemished animals for offerings for sin, burnt, fellowship and grain offerings. These were to facilitate their seeing the glory of God (vs 6). It was confirmed in vs 23.
- c. Eventually, "fire came out from the presence of the Lord ... on the altar... when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell face down
- d. Vs 24 – the role of fire in ancient Israel is triple:
 - i. To enable the seeing of God's glory.
 - ii. To bring joy to the people.
 - iii. To be thankful and revere God in prayers.

2. The Presence and Essence of Fire in Ancient Israel's Worship and Life

Leviticus chapter 9: shows how "fire came from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering on the altar". It was repeated in the OT's 1 Kings 18:38-39 on Elijah's twelve –stone altar of seed and bull offerings and the answer to Elijah's prayer to God. It was to confirm Elijah's prayer to God to prove that "you are the God of Israel" (vs 36).

The result was two – fold: worship and praise. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord – he is God”. The presence of God, synonymous with fire and confirmed to the Israelites of old, always produced a positive response from them;

- a. Joshua chapter 3 narrates how the presence of the Lord, in the Ark of Covenant carried by the Priests dammed the waters of the Jordan River for the Israelites to pass through on the dry river floor.
- b. The sixth chapter of Joshua shows how the presence of the Lord by the symbolism of the Ark of the Lord, carried round the impenetrable double walls of Jericho, miraculously flattened the walls. Jericho was eventually destroyed for a free passage by them on their way to Canaan.
- c. Moses saw a seemingly altar-fire of God in a bush that did not burn in Exodus chapter 3. He wondered and became inquisitive; there and then, Moses was called to get prepared to deliver the nation Israel. God spoke to Moses from the fire, God’s fire, his assurance of freeing Israel from Pharaoh’s bondage. Moses would be Israel’s agent for their freedom and making it the main phase of his life.

However, we shall see that when God’s fire dims, dulled or completely went off from situations and persons, it brought their downfall or ultimately destruction and death. A classic example in the OT is recorded in 1 Samuel chapters 2 -5 of how dull a person of God could be when the word of God and his vision became rare. This was during the three centuries of the Judges. The casualties were Eli and his two sons. Eli could not be firm in the discipline of his sons while they in turn were greedy consistently, thereby disregarding God in worship.

It was a time “The lamp of God had not yet gone out” The altar-fire, as it were, was dim already. That was why God called Samuel, the boy rather than Eli who was the Prophet and the more experienced servant of God. So, in a battle later against the Philistines, Israel’s arch-enemy, but ignorant that the Ark of the Lord was empty due to their sins. Hophni and Phinehas, sons of Eli were both killed and Israel’s army defeated. The Ark was captured and the fire of God was gone. The shocking news was too much for 98-year old Eli who fell off his reclining chair at home and finally broke his neck and died.

3. What Determines the Presence and Absence of the Fire of God?

Adam and Eve, our first parents, disobeyed God and hid from him (Genesis 3: 1-8). Cain their first son was the first murderer who committed fratricide against his brother, Abel (Genesis 4: 1-8). Much later in Genesis 6:1-8, God grieved at the inevitable destruction of humankind by the flood later. However, “Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, as he walked with God”. These were before the nation of Israel came to be. Albeit, human- beings’ character and attitudes have remained the same, constantly being disobedient to God.

Ordained clergies, the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, in Leviticus 10:1-2, abused their office as priests in a flagrant act of disrespect to God, whereas God had just reviewed with them precisely how they were to conduct worship. “They offered unauthorized fire before the Lord”, in negligence. Disrespect of God and negligence of worship duty were causes for the absence of the fire of God. One noticed the comment against the constant unethical life of Israel from its early formation. However, the unfailing love of God as a merciful father was in play too (Judges 3:7-15 and 4: 1-3). Their misdeeds were like a recurring decimal calling for God’s action against the nation. Eventually, the nation was exiled in batches, the northern kingdom first in 722BC by Assyria and Judah in the South by Babylon in the final batch of 586BC. It was as if both sections (North and South) did not have God’s Ten Commandments. The wages of sin is death.

So what determines the presence and absence of the fire of God? We shall in answer list both in the following case studies:

a. Moses

- i. He developed the habits of obedience to God and consistently served God. (Exodus 14:10-28).
- ii. Was willing to use his own abilities and strengths to do God’s will. Exodus 3:10 and 4:1- 17.

b. Samuel

- i Samuel willingly served in many roles for God and people. He worked as a judge, a priest, a prophet and a counselor. (1 Samuel 3:19-20).
- ii He was a selfless leader. (1 Samuel 12:1- 4).

These two great men of God allowed themselves to be directed by God – his fire and light.

Absence of Fire

a. Solomon

Solomon became an idolater from his numerous amorous relationships with pagan women. (1 Kings 3:1- 3). He excessively taxed his people and drafted men into a labour and military force. (2 Chronicles 8:1-6).

b. The Nation of Israel

- i. The captivity and exile of the nation of Israel to Babylon was in order to remove them from his presence because of their sins. (2 Kings 24:3).
- ii. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. It was because of the Lord's anger that all this happened, and in the end he thrust them from his presence. 2 Kings 24:19.

God's Presence will be derived when one does the following:

- a. Develop the habit of obedience and consistently obey him.
- b. Willingly serve God selflessly.
- c. Trust and depend on him and publicly acknowledge him in one's life.
- d. Be a forgiving person

God's presence, in turn, the result of persistent disobedience to God by the Israelites, weakened the nation. They were to be a light to the Gentiles but had become darkened in their hearts, thoughts and actions. The cumulative result was Israel's eventual 70 years of exile in Babylon.

4. The Effects of the Fire of God in Contemporary Times

The fire of God can be considered in two ways:-

- a. The fire of God in his judgment against persistent disobedience and sinning. (Revelation 2:21-23).
- b. God's fire in his love and mercy. (Romans 5:8)

Fire of God in Judgment

The world of Noah's time was bad, terribly sinning, calling for God's disgust expressed in Genesis 6:5. "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become....his heart was only evil all the time".

Nigeria today, and the rest of the world, have not changed. The nations of the world are now worse in disobedience to God's command and sinfulness. Douglas (1988) lists idolatry, cursing, disrespect to parents, murder, adultery, stealing, lying and covetousness against the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20: 3-17.

1 Timothy 1: 9-11 has lawlessness, disobedience, un-holiness, profanity and kidnapping. These two lists of sins probably had Nigeria in mind. The 2022 Bible Study Outlines published by the Nigerian Anglican Church considered the characteristics of ungodly rulers. It listed greed, injustice, selfishness, nepotism, dishonesty and unfaithfulness each to be studied on a number of Sundays before the service.

God did punish Israel in the sixth century BC (2 Kings 25). Nigeria and many countries are in throes now in the 21st AD. So will nations suffer in the future by the fire of God (2 Peter 3:7).

The Contemporary Altar Fire

The various events of God's punishment on Israel for sins by allowing Babylonians and other nation to destroy them, ruin Jerusalem include the temple is vividly described by Jeremiah in the book of Lamentation 2:7-8.

"The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, and he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her places.... The Lord hath purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion, he hath stretched out a line.....and wall of to lament, and they languished together".

The spread of the altar to other parts of the earth featured in Isaiah's prophesy in Isaiah 19:19-20.

"In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt..... And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the Lord of host in the land of Egypt, they cry unto the Lord because of the oppressors....."

There is a modification in the concept of the altar fire; the modification is reflected in the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. The sacrifices of animals offered at the altar would not be sufficient to take away the sins of the man. This concept is explicit in Hebrews chapter 10, where Jesus Christ abolishes the sacrifice of burnt offering to establish the eternal sacrifice of himself on the cross once and for all. Jesus Christ was the sacrificial lamb, the great high priest in the eternal death on the cross of Calvary, the mediator between God and man in which man has direct access to God through the blood of Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 2:5 - 6 stated clearly of a mediator between God and man: "who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, no more altar fire and lamb sacrifices for salvation.

Today in the entire Christian churches worldwide, altar has now become a table for communion services, sometimes a place for giving out the word of God to the people. The descent of the Holy Spirit in form of fire on the day of Pentecost, the heart of man becomes God's altar, the center of his temple which is our body, by this altar fire, Holiness and purification are attained.

Conclusion

Yahweh invented fire while man builds altars; until God's fire comes on the work of man, it remains ordinary, an important image but when the divine fire of God descends, the altar becomes a divine supernatural force to our natural circumstance, it is with the cooperation of man's faith and God's power. God does not need man to work on his power but men need him to make use and enjoy his power. Worship of God depends on true obedience. Oblations and sacrifices of lamb (animals) cannot take the place of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. God's will must be done in God's own way, then the fire of his love for mankind will burn in the heart altar of man which will be regarded as True worship and True Religion. This paper traced the concept of altar fire and sacrifices placing great emphasis on Yahweh's requirements from human services. Holiness and obedience are of paramount concern to God, therefore for worship to be genuine, it should focus on Yahweh. Christians in Nigeria and other countries of the world today are today's Israel, therefore God's fire of love and his blessing for us will continue to burn in the heart of men if only man will ever remain faithful, dedicated and obedient to his service.

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