

“Prepare” Series

Echo Church | Week 46 | November 16, 2025 | Rich Saunders Jr. |

“Part 2: “Prepare the Altar” | 1 Kings 18:20-39 (NKJV)

20 So Ahab sent for all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together on Mount Carmel.

21 And Elijah came to all the people, and said, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people answered him not a word.

22 Then Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men.

23 Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it.

24 Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” So all the people answered and said, “It is well spoken.”

25 Now Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one bull for yourselves and prepare it first, for you are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it.”

26 So they took the bull which was given them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, “O Baal, hear us!” But there was no voice; no one answered. Then they leaped about the altar which they had made.

27 And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.”

28 So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them.

29 And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down.

31 And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, “Israel shall be your name.”

32 Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs of seed.

33 And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, “Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood.”

34 Then he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time; and he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time.

35 So the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water.

36 And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word.

37 Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again."

38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!"

Introduction

We live in a culture of convenience, a society of spiritual shallowness. We want the benefits of following God without the cost of discipleship. We want the fire of Pentecost without the surrender of Gethsemane. We've become experts at building platforms for our personalities but have forgotten how to build altars for God's presence. In 1 Kings 18 we discover a nation in crisis. A spiritual drought mirroring a natural one. We have Ahab, the compromised king. Jezebel, the manipulative queen. Israel, the divided people, "limping between two different opinions" (v. 21). And Elijah, the prophet of God. The challenge is issued: A showdown on Mount Carmel. It's not a contest between two Gods; it's a clarification of who is the *only* God. The prophets of Baal go first: They shout, they dance, they cut themselves—a whole lot of activity, but no answer. All spectacle, no substance. Elijah's response teaches us three critical steps to see God move in our lives and in our generation. First, we must repair what we've replaced. Second, we must choose sacrifice over spectacle. And third, we must understand that alignment always precedes fire.

Point 1: Repair What We've Replaced

Before God sends fire, He looks for a consecrated place to send it. Your breakthrough is waiting on the other side of your repair work. "And Elijah said to all the people, 'Come near to me.' So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down." (1 Kings 18:30 He didn't build a new altar; he repaired the *existing* one. This signifies a return to foundational truth, not the creation of a new trend. The altar was "broken down"—a symbol of neglect, compromise, and divided loyalties. We have altars in our lives that are in disrepair. We try to worship God on Sunday and serve the gods of money, status, and self-interest Monday through Saturday. This is spiritual syncretism. It doesn't work. God doesn't do joint custody. When we compromise it costs us something.

Repairing the altar means rediscovering the foundational practices of our faith: prayer, scripture, repentance, and community.

Jeremiah 2:13: "For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water."

Hosea 10:12: "Sow for yourselves righteousness; Reap in mercy; Break up your fallow ground, For it is time to seek the LORD, Till He comes and rains righteousness on you."

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."

Personal Altar: What daily rhythms of prayer and scripture reading need repair in your life? Stop scrolling and start seeking.

Family Altar: When was the last time your household intentionally worshipped or prayed together? Lead your home back to the altar.

Corporate Altar: As a church, we must prioritize discipleship over materialism, presence over performance.

"You cannot build a future with God on the broken foundations of your past compromises. Repair is the prerequisite for revival."

Point 2: Sacrifice Over Spectacle

God doesn't respond to our performance; He responds to our posture of surrender. The prophets of Baal had the show; Elijah had the sacrifice. Elijah prepares the bull and lays it on the wood. There is no shouting, no frenzy. Just methodical, intentional obedience.

Baal's prophets offered spectacle: emotionalism, theatrics, self-harm. They tried to manipulate a response from their god. Elijah offered sacrifice: a life laid down, a trust placed in God's character, not his own effort.

We chase the emotional high of a worship service but resist the daily death of our ego. An encounter without a commitment to obedience is just spiritual entertainment. The Currency of Heaven: The currency of heaven is not our talent, our charisma, or our noise. The currency of heaven is a surrendered life.

Psalm 51:17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise."

1 Samuel 15:22: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams."

Matthew 16:24: "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'"

Hebrews 13:15–16: "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Shift your prayer from "God, bless what I'm doing" to "God, what are You doing that I can be a part of?" Identify one area of your life you've been withholding from God—your career, your relationship, your finances—and consciously place it on the altar this week.

"Spectacle begs for attention; sacrifice commands heaven's attention. God is not moved by the volume of your voice but by the velocity of your surrender."

Point 3: Alignment Precedes Fire

God's power flows through prepared channels. The order of operations matters. Before God sends His fire, He requires our alignment. *"And he took twelve stones...he put the wood in order, cut the bull in*

pieces...and he said, 'Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood.'"
(1 Kings 18:31–35)

The 12 stones represented the unity and identity of all of Israel. God wants to restore the whole, not just bless the fragments. Notice the order: The stones, the wood, the sacrifice. There is a divine sequence. You can't have the fire without first having the wood and the sacrifice. The water: He drenches the altar in water, making it humanly impossible to light. This wasn't a lack of faith; it was the height of faith. He was creating a scenario where only God could get the glory.

Purify Our Motives, the water is a symbol of purifying our motives. Are we building this altar so people will see how great we are, or so people will see that God is God? The fire is not for our brand; it's for His glory. God's Fire Reveals God's Identity: "Then the fire of the LORD fell...and when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!'" (v. 38–39). The purpose of the fire was clarification.

James 4:8–10: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded...Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."

2 Chronicles 7:1–3: "When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering...and the glory of the LORD filled the temple."

Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."

Stop trying to make things happen in your own strength. Do the work of alignment—repair, sacrifice, purify—and then trust God to do the work only He can do. Drench your efforts in dependency on Him. The goal isn't just manifestation; it's magnification—of God.

"You don't have to manufacture a fire when your life is aligned for a lightning strike from heaven. Alignment is the activator of God's power."

Conclusion

We've seen the blueprint. The crisis of our day is a crisis of the altar. We've replaced it with platforms, traded sacrifice for spectacle, and pursued manifestation without alignment. Elijah's assignment was simple, and so is ours: Prepare the altar. That's it. Our job is not to call down the fire. Our job is to build the structure that can handle it when it comes. The ultimate altar was the cross. The ultimate sacrifice was Jesus Christ. He didn't just offer something on the altar; He became the altar and the sacrifice, making a way for us to be reconciled to God. The fire of God's judgment that we deserved was poured out on Him, so the fire of God's presence could be poured into us. Today, God is not asking for a performance. He is asking for a position. A position of surrender on the altar. Your assignment is simple: Prepare the altar of your heart.

Prayer

With every head bowed and every eye closed, I want to give you a moment to respond. For some of you, today is the day you repent—you turn away from the altars of Baal in your life. The idols of self, success, and security. For others, it's time to rebuild. That personal altar of prayer and devotion is in disrepair. You're making a decision today to pick up the stones and start again. For others here, it's time to present your life as a living sacrifice. You've been giving God your leftovers. Today, you put it all on the wood—your career, your future, your relationships.

Maybe you are here and you've never been reconciled to God through Jesus, the first step is to receive the ultimate sacrifice. The fire has already fallen on Him so that grace could fall on you. If that's you, in any of those categories, I want you to make your way to this physical altar, not as a place of spectacle, but as a space of sacred surrender. Let's prepare the altar together.