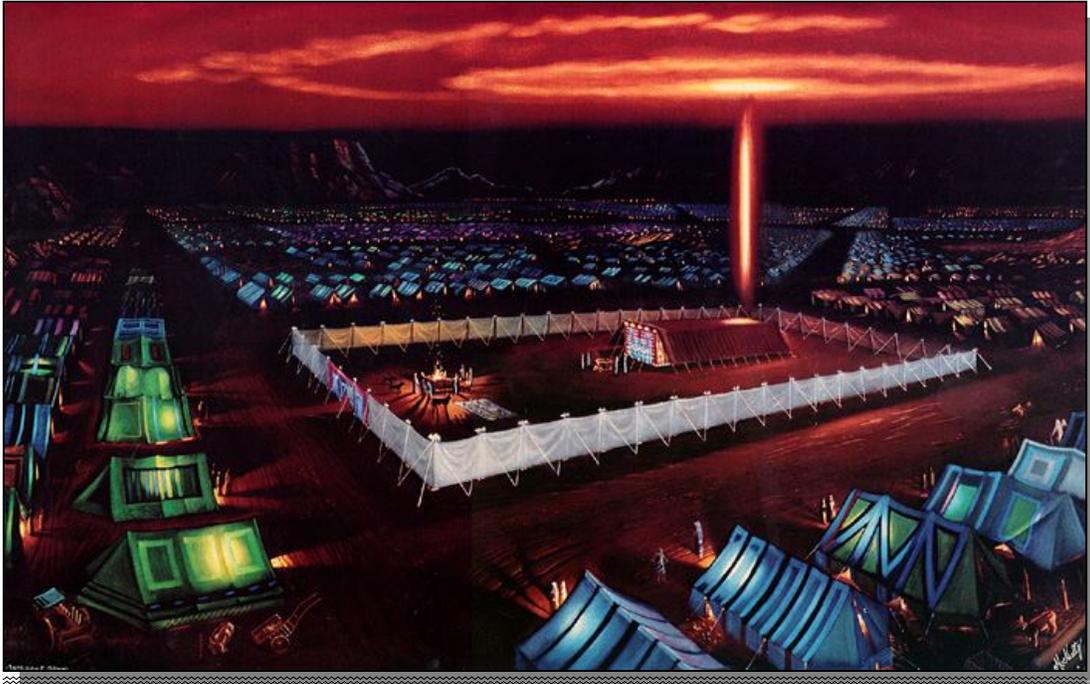
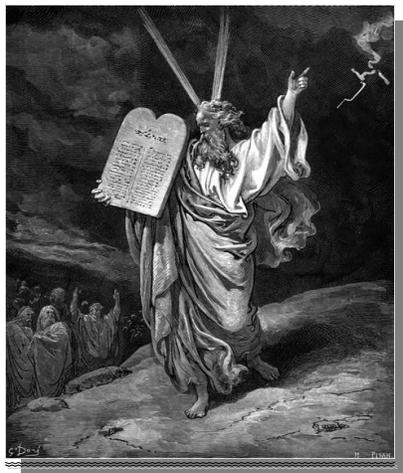


The Tabernacle of Moses



Lesson 7 -- The Brazen Altar



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Exodus 27:1-8 KJV And thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof *shall be* three cubits. [2] And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt overlay it with brass. [3] And thou shalt make his pans to receive his ashes, and his shovels, and his basons, and his fleshhooks, and his firepans: all the vessels thereof thou shalt make of brass. [4] And thou shalt make for it a grate of network of brass; and upon the net shalt thou make four brasen rings in the four corners thereof. [5] And thou shalt put it under the compass of the altar beneath, that the net may be even to the midst of the altar. [6] And thou shalt make staves for the altar, staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with brass. [7] And the staves shall be put into the rings, and the staves shall be upon the two sides of the altar, to bear it. [8] Hollow with boards shalt thou make it: as it was shewed thee in the mount, so shall they make it. (Cf. Exodus 38:1-7)

I. INTRODUCTION—A DISTINCTION IN ALTARS

In coming to this last piece of furniture in the Tabernacle, it is important to make a distinction between the brazen altar and the altar of incense. The brazen altar is what came to mind in the Hebrews when an altar was referred to. It is referred to as the Altar (Exodus 38:43; 29: 12; 29:44; 30:20). The reference indicates that it is always associated with sacrifice which involves the slaying or slaughtering of an animal. When the sacrifice was offered, it was understood that every activity of the priest and specifically when he was involved in worship that there was an element of sacrifice that would be involved.

- The offerings of the morning and evening sacrifices sheltered Israel despite their failures and weaknesses.
- The offerings on this altar on the Sabbath looked forward to a time of rest at some future point.
- The sacrifices offered during the times of the feasts served as a time of either joy or humiliation (dependent on the feast) and were attached to their worship.
- The altar was involved whether the worship of the nation or of an individual was involved.
- The altar was involved in the consecration of the priests as they advanced step-by-step in the process of sanctification on the way to the Ark of the Covenant.

Every part of the fresh mercies that Israel received and the blessings they received all were attached to this single altar of sacrifice.

This altar was also referred to as the Altar of Burnt Offering (Exodus 30:28; 31:9; 35:16; 38:1; 40:6; 40:10; 40:29; Leviticus 4:7; 4:10; 4:18). The Hebrew thought associated with this title is that the sacrifice was one that always was ascending. All that was consumed on the altar would ascend before God and it would be an odor of sweet savor. There was a blessing of acceptance from God. All that was burned on this altar was given to the Lord and for Him alone.

This altar was also referred to as the Altar by the door of the Tabernacle. The implication in this rendering is that the position of the altar was closest to the entrance of the Tabernacle. There was no approach to God without first passing by the place of sacrifice. In our relationship with God as we have fellowship with Him, two things should stand out in this thought of the sacrifice being the first approach to Him: 1) the knowledge of the suffering Savior as a lamb slain; and 2) the only way to get to God is through the blood of Christ. But that pathway of sacrifice leads us all the way to the Ark where reconciliation takes place.

Any priest who desired to worship God in the Tabernacle would pass by the Altar of the Burnt-Offering at the door and enter the holy place under the sweet savor of a sacrificed lamb, ascending from the fire of the altar.

The final contrast between the two altars was that one was for sacrifice and the second one was for fellowship, one being brass and the other being golden. However, the fire on the brazen altar was what fueled the altar of incense. The connection could be termed in this way, if there is no sacrifice there will not be any incense. One of the most evident reasons that our generation does not have an adequate prayer altar is because there is little that has been offered as a sacrifice to the Lord.

Romans 12:1-2 KJV I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is your reasonable service.* [2] And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

II. THE BRAZEN ALTAR

A. The Measurements and Materials and Horns—Exodus 27:1-2

Exodus 27:1-2 KJV And thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof *shall be* three cubits. [2] And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt overlay it with brass.

The brazen altar was the largest piece of furniture in the Tabernacle. In fact, all of the other furniture of the Tabernacle could sit inside of the Altar once the grating was removed from the inside. It was 7 ½ feet wide, 7 ½ feet long, and 4 ½ feet high. It was apparently a hollow square that did not have a floor or a top. Inside of it was a grate of brazen iron that sat 27 inches from the ground. This is the exact height of the Ark of the Covenant, precisely equaling the height of the Mercy Seat. If the Ark contained the Mercy Seat, then the Brazen Altar and grate could be deemed as the Judgment Seat. The blood was shed at the Brazen Altar on the Day of Atonement and it was taken to the other seat, the Mercy Seat by the High Priest. Judgment and mercy are linked up in these two pieces of furniture (Psalm 85:10; John 1:17; James 1:13; Matthew 18:23-25); the first and the last pieces of the furniture.

This grate would prevent the Altar from twisting when the heat of fire was present on it and when the Altar was moved, the grate also provided more stability for it to be carried by its staves which fit through the rings on the sides of the altar.

Because of its massive size, it literally stood in the way of the priest who was moving through the door or gate of the Tabernacle. It was an altar that belonged only to the people of God, no one else could use this structure.

- It was symbolic for the need of atonement.
- It was symbolic of the need for reconciliation with God.
- It was symbolic of the fact that sacrificial blood had to be offered for reconciliation to take place.

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- It was symbolic of the fact that Jesus Christ is the sin-bearer (Isaiah 53:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:3; 1 Peter 2:24; Heb. 9:28).

There is no other way to gain salvation except through the atonement of Jesus Christ. The philosophies of the world teach that men are going to be saved by doing the best they can do. There are implications that men can be saved through various religions because they are all worshipping the same god. Some even have believed that they can be saved because they are following those who would deem themselves as prophets of God.

The brazen altar proves something totally different from this idea. The following Scriptures can shed greater light on this fact:

John 1:29 KJV The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

Hebrews 9:13-14 KJV For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: **[14]** How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Hebrews 9:22-28 KJV And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. **[23]** *It was* therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. **[24]** For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, *which are* the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: **[25]** Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; **[26]** For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. **[27]** And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: **[28]** So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

1 Peter 1:18-19 KJV Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as silver and gold*, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; **[19]** But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

1 John 1:7 KJV But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

These facts are so large that our society cannot get around them just as the priests could not get around the altar. The life and testimony of Jesus Christ through the work of Calvary stands as one of the greatest monuments in the history of the world.

The brazen altar was made of acacia wood and it was covered with brass. As noted from earlier studies the wood was from acacia which speaks of the incorruptible nature of the Lord. The brass speaks of the righteousness and the associated justice of judgment for sin. This covering of bronze was very important because it helped to preserve the wood from the fire. The

fire was to be burning at all times (Lev. 6:13) and if the bronze would not have been present the altar would not have made it through the first offering of the sacrifice.

Clearly, if the wood is the fleshly aspect of the ministry of Jesus Christ then the brass is also associated with the deity of Jesus. He literally was both God and man and He is the only one who could have endured the Cross (John 19:17; Php. 2:8; Heb. 12:2). Any other man would have literally been consumed by the burden of sin and the wrath of God's judgment. To show the brass as a part of the Lord's work, the following Scriptures can help us to see:

Ezekiel 40:3 KJV And he brought me thither, and, behold, *there was* a man, whose appearance *was* like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed; and he stood in the gate.

Revelation 1:15 KJV And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

Revelation 2:18 KJV And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet *are* like fine brass;

One can make a few summations about this aspect of the brass and the deity of Christ.

- He endured the Cross so that we might be saved from our sins—Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 3:18.
- He endured the Cross so that we might be freed from the curse of the Law—Gal. 3:13.
- He endured the Cross so that we might be healed—Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24.

But now we find an additional aspect to the altar—the horns of the altar.

The horns were at the four corners of the altar and they were also symbolic of some aspects of salvation. The horns symbolized the atoning power of the altar. God would accept the sacrifice for the priest who was offering the sacrifice. In the process of the sacrifice, blood would also be placed on the horns of the altar before the rest was poured out at the base of the altar (Exodus 29:12; Lev. 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34; 8:15; 9:9; 16:18). The horns also were symbolic of God's power and strength (Josh. 6:4-6; 1 Sam. 2:10; Ps. 75:10; 89:17; 89:24; 148:14). They also symbolized God's salvation (Exo. 30:10; Lev. 8:15; 16:18; 1 Sam. 2:1; Psalm 118:27; Luke 1:69). The horns on the altar were also significant for God's protection, security, sanctuary, and help (2 Sam. 22:3; Psalm 18:2; 1 Kings 1:50; 2:28).

B. The Tools of the Brazen Altar—Exodus 27:3

Exodus 27:3 KJV And thou shalt make his pans to receive his ashes, and his shovels, and his basons, and his fleshhooks, and his firepans: all the vessels thereof thou shalt make of brass.

There were five accompanying tools that went with the ministry of the altar: The pans, the shovels, the basins, the fleshhooks, and the firepans. All of them spoke very clearly again of the work of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

- **The Pans**—The pans were used to pick up the ashes. The ashes were always evident of a sacrifice that had been offered to God. It spoke of the thoroughness of His work at the Cross (John 4:34; 19:30).
- **The Shovels**—The shovels were obviously used to pick up the ashes and were also used to assist the fire—either tending or feeding it. The shovels suggest the faithfulness of the His work at the Cross because Jesus never did shirk His responsibility at the Cross (Heb. 12:2; 5:8; Php. 2:8).
- **The Basins**—The basins held the blood of the sacrifices. They were carried inside the Tabernacle and poured out at the foot of the altar. This shows the selflessness of the His work at the Cross as He literally emptied Himself at the Cross (2 Cor. 8:9).
- **The Flesh-hooks**—The flesh-hooks were pronged devices that were used to arrange the order of the sacrifice on the wood. If the sacrifice moved at all, it was brought back into place with the flesh-hooks. This speaks of the steadfastness of His work on the Cross (Luke 23:39; 2 Cor. 13:4).
- **The Fire-pans**—These were actually censers that would be used to carry the glowing coals from the Brazen Altar to the Altar of Incense. The fire on the altar does speak of the wrath of God against sin but it also is significant of the zeal, passion, and love that served as motivation for the Lord toward the church. The fire-pans are associated with the zeal of His work at the Cross (John 2:17; Lev. 6:13).

III. CONCLUSION—WHAT KIND OF ALTAR DOES MAN NEED?

As we conclude this portion on the altar, it is a fair question to consider as to what kind of altar that man needs. When the presentation is given of the Brazen Altar in the Tabernacle, it becomes clear that this altar is much likened to the New Testament cross that Jesus instructed we would have to carry (Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23-27). It can be weighty, demanding, and uncompromising but it is pathway for which man has to be saved.

In the Old Testament, there is a king named Ahaz (2 Kings 16) who determined that the altar that had been ordered by God was simply not good enough. On a trip to Damascus, he encountered an altar that was much more appealing to his eyes and his flesh. The more comparisons that he made with the altar at Damascus and the one in the Temple, he saw how crude and limited it was to what Damascus had to offer. He found a priest that he could hire by the name of Urijah who he sent to Damascus to check out the better altar. It was not long until Urijah had constructed one that was moved into the Temple to take the place of the old one that God had ordered. It led to a huge downfall in their spiritual relationship with God.

If we are not careful and diligent in our relationship with God, we will find altars that are much more attractive than the one that God has called for. Modern day altars are filled with things that have no ability to save us. They will deceive us and in the end we will be lost.

- Altars of religion and ritual.
- Altars of works and good deeds.
- Altars of doing good and feeling good.
- Altars of money and gifts.
- Altars that require no sacrifice.
- Altars that allow men to do their own thing.
- Altars that are based on self-help and self-esteem.
- Altars that boost our ego and self-image.

There are other substitute altars in the Bible besides the one of Ahaz:

- **The Altar of Jeroboam**—1 Kings 12:25-33; 13:1-5—It was rent in judgment.
- **The Altar to the Unknown God**—Acts 17:23—This represented the height of Greek wisdom and culture.

- **The Altars to Baal and all false gods**—1 Kings 18—These altars were built on every high hill and groves were built under every green tree. These were an abomination to God and an insult to God's altar.

As with the previous substitute altars of modern culture, the reality of it all is that none of these altars can save us. It is only through the finished work of Jesus Christ that such salvation and forgiveness of sin can take place.

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