

An Attempt To Listen To God

The Brazen Altar

Introduction

By

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Introduction

As I view the Tabernacle, apart from the Ark and Mercy Seat, there is no piece of furniture more solemn and sacred than that of the brazen altar. The altar was a large hollow box constructed of wood with brass (more correctly copper) covering the wood on the inside and out. (The golden Ark and the altar were the only two pieces of furniture in which they were covered inside and out with a metal). There was a grate in the middle and on the grate were four rings which staves went through for carrying of it. As with all the furnishings, except the Laver and Lamp stand, we are given its measurements. Being approximately eight feet square and five feet high it was the largest piece of furniture. The best design I have seen of the altar and which corresponds most closely with the scriptures is the following illustration taken from "Sickle of Truth" web site. My only questioning of it is "How would they have gotten the ashes that fell through the grate?" It seems to me that on one side, possibly the East (Lev. 1:16), the wall would not have come the whole way down, thus leaving a space for the shovels to get into the ark for the removal of the ashes.



Its solemnity and sacredness is due to the truths it signifies, being a foreshadow of the Lord and His sufferings for sin. Due to its purpose and size, it impresses on our minds the seriousness of sin which is never to be taken lightly. There is constant reference to the sacrificial blood and the altar. We read of the "blood sprinkled on the altar" (Ex. 24:6); "blood . . . put upon the horns of the altar" (Ex. 29:12); "blood upon the altar" (Lev. 8:19); "blood poured out at the bottom of the altar" (Lev. 8:15); "blood . . . round about" the altar (Ex. 29:20); "blood thereof shall be wrung out at the side of the altar" (Lev. 1:15); "the blood, upon the altar. . . blood. . . shall be poured out upon the altar" (Deut. 12:27); "blood of his peace offerings sprinkled upon the altar" (2 Kgs. 16:13).

As we contemplate the words used to describe the propitiatory work of Christ, words such as, "smitten" "wounded" "forsaken" we are made aware that sin is not a slight misdemeanor or accident which God glosses over.

Of the seven pieces of furniture, the altar is spoken of more often than all the others.

There is a painting of the Lord when He was a little child in the streets of Egypt and Nazareth. In the painting He is running toward His mother with arms outstretched. The sun is behind Him and on the ground is the shadow of the cross. Whither the artist was aware of it or not, I cannot tell, but it presents the truth that the cross was ever before Him. It was before Him before He left the realms of bliss, for He came as the Lamb who "verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20). It was the event of His suffering for sin that the Passover lamb typified (Ex. 12:1-14). Throughout man's history God pointed forward to the sacrifice of the Lord by:

- a) People such as Abel, Isaac, and Jonah.
- b) Promises (Gen. 4:4; Isa. 53:4-6, 8, 10-11)
- c) Prophetic statements (Psa. 22:1; 69:1, 4; Zech. 13:7)
- d) Pictures such as the Ark (Gen. 6:14)
- e) The Blood sprinkled door posts and lintel (Ex. 12:7)
- f) The Smitten Rock (Ex. 17:6)
- g) The Brazen Serpent (Num. 21:9)
- h) The various offerings (Lev. chs 1-6)
- i) The Day of Atonement (Lev. 16)

Thus, before the foundation of the world and for some 1400 years before the Lord's coming, there were signposts pointing to that which lay ahead of Him. When He was here there were more pointers such as His baptism which foreshadowed it (Mk. 1:9; Lk. 12:50). There were also His words (Matt. 16:21).

God Gave Specific Instructions Concerning:

- 1) What the altar was to be made from
“And he (Moses) made the altar of burnt offering of shittim wood: five cubits was the length thereof, and five cubits the breadth thereof; it was foursquare; and three cubits the height thereof” (Ex. 38:1). “The brazen altar, and his grate of brass, his staves, and all his vessels, the laver and his foot” (Ex. 39:39).
- 2) Where the altar was to be placed
“And he put the altar of burnt offering by the door of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation, and offered upon it the burnt offering and the meat offering; as the LORD commanded Moses” (Ex. 40:29). Between it and the Tabernacle door was the laver (Ex. 40:7).
- 3) The anointing of the Altar
“And thou shalt anoint the altar of the burnt offering, and all his vessels, and sanctify the altar: and it shall be an altar most holy” (Ex. 40:10).
- 4) How the altar was to be carried and by whom
It was carried by the Kohathites (Num. 4:4-15); by means of the staves (Ex. 27:6); covered by a purple cloth (Num. 4:13); and in it there was to be put the instruments associated with it, and then all covered with badger skins (Num. 4:14).
- 5) The altar was a place when man could meet with God and enquire
“And the brazen altar shall be for me to enquire by” (2 Kgs. 16:15). Yet God also said that the Mercy Seat was the place where He would commune with man (Ex. 25:22).
- 6) The altar was elevated
Normally pictures and models have the altar placed on the ground but this could not be correct for God said: “And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them, and came down from offering of the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and peace offerings” (Lev. 9:22). However, it was to be a sloping ascend for: “Neither shall thou go up by steps unto mine altar” (Ex. 20:26).
- 7) The various sorts of altars
Altars were made for the acknowledgment of the god worshipped and was a place whereupon sacrifices to that god were placed. In the scriptures they were made of earth and unhewn stone (Ex. 20:25); wood and copper (Ex. 27:1-2); wood and gold (Ex. 30:1-3); but never of bricks (Isa. 65:3). The altar of wood (Ezek. 41:22) by its very construction, and not being covered by copper, could not be for burning the sacrifices.

It is noteworthy that the first mention of an altar was when Noah built one after the flood (Gen. 8:20). Thereafter, the following individuals built one. Abraham (Gen. 12:7-8); Isaac (Gen. 26:25); Balak (Num. 23:1); Joshua (Josh. 8:30); Gideon (Jud. 6:24); Manoah (Jud. 13:20); Samuel (1 Sam. 7:17); Saul (1 Sam. 14:35); David (2 Sam. 24:25); Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 12:32); Ahab (1 Kgs. 16:32); Elijah (1 Kgs. 18:31); Uriah (2 Kgs. 16:16); Manasseh (2 Kgs. 21:3); Ahaz (2 Kgs. 16:10-12), and Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:2). As well, individuals groups of people had altars, the Hebrew tribes (Josh. 22:10) and the Athenians (Acts 17:23). Obviously Cain and Abel built altars but it does not say so.

In the Tabernacle there were two of furniture called “altar” the “The Brazen Altar” and the “The Golden Altar”. By their structure and purpose they carried two different significances. The following is some of the contrasts and similarities between them:

Their Similarities

Brazen Altar	References	Golden Altar	References
Burn	Ex. 29:13	Burn	Ex. 30:1
The fire never to go out	Lev. 6:13	It was to be a perpetual incense	Ex. 30:8
Four horns	Ex. 27:2	Four horns	Ex. 37:25
Four square	Ex. 27:1	Four square	Ex. 30:2

Their Contrasts

Brazen Altar	References	Golden Altar	References
In the court	Ex. 40:29	In the holy Place	Ex. 40:26
Animals offered	Lev. chs. 1-6	Incense offered	Ex. 30:1

Significances

Brazen Altar	Golden Altar
Substitution	Intercession
Finished work of Christ	Unfinished work of Christ
Christ on the Cross	Christ in heaven
Christ as Saviour	Christ as Priest
My justification	My Sanctification
A past work	A present work
3 hours of darkness	Entire life of Christ

The brazen altar of the tabernacle and the ones made by Solomon had several names:

Name	Number of occurrences	1st Reference	Last reference
Altar of Burnt offering	10	Ex. 30:28	2 Chron 29:18
Brazen Altar	9	Ex. 38:30	Ezek.9:2
Altar of the Lord	22	Lev. 17:6	2 Chron.8:12
Altar of the God of Israel	1	Ezra 3:2	

Name	Number of occurrences	1st Reference	Last reference
Altar of the house of your God	1	Ezra 7:17	
Altar of the LORD thy God	4	Deut. 12:27	Deut. 27:6
Altar of the LORD our God	3	Josh. 22:19	Neh. 10:34

It is never called the altar of sin or trespass offering for which I thank God. Had it been designated by such terms there would have always been the reminding me of my sins. Rather, it is an altar of Burnt offering indicating the acceptability of the sacrifice by God, for His satisfaction. The word “burnt offering” is a single word in Hebrew which means: “to ascend, to rise up”. It was not a called by a horizontally flowing offering, that is since God was in the Holiest, it did not flow toward Him, but it emphatically emphasises that God is high above and that which go to Him must ascend.

The Significance of The Materials

There were two materials used for this altar, wood and copper. I am aware the KJV reads “brazen”, indicating it was covered with brass. However, brass is an alloy and has a much lower melting temperature than copper. Having already dealt with the metals and their significances in another paper the comments here will be brief.

The wood indicates the humanity of the Lord but “trees” are often linked with men in governmental places. Examples of this is Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:20); Pharaoh (Ezek. 31:10); The Assyrian (Ezek. 31:3, 8). Therefore, being wood it prefigures Christ as the Man who is King, on whom was laid the fierceness of the judgment of God for our sins. It must be observed that the altar, the sacrifice, and the priest, all typify our Lord but in different aspects. Our Lord was a real man who came to do that which no other man could do: “Redeem his brother” (Psa. 49:7). Thank God that: “when He had by Himself purged our sins” (Heb. 1:3) He ascended to Heaven and now He is exalted as Lord (Acts 2:36); Advocate (1 Jn. 2:1); Prince (Acts 5:31); and soon to be “Governor among the nations” (Psa. 22:28); “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords” (Rev. 19:16).

The wood is called Shittim which comes from a root word meaning “to pierce”, and the root word is translated “scourges” (Josh. 23:13). Thus it foreshadows the King who was scourged and pierced. Zachariah prophesied: “They shall look on Him whom they pierced” (Zech. 12:10). Turning to the New Testament we read: “Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged Him” (Jn. 19:1); “The soldier pierced His side” (Jn. 19:34); “They shall look on Him whom they pierced” (Rev. 1:7).

The Copper

This metal indicates the ability of the Lord to withstand the fierceness of the judgment of God which was pictured as fire: “From above hath He sent fire into my bones” (Lam. 1:13). Fire came out from God and slew Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:2) because of their sin. “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29) and conveying the severity of the physical afflictions the Lord knew, the sacrifice burning on the altar indicated the severity of Divine judgment.

There are at least three words translated “Burn”:

- a) “Qatar” used of the trespass offering (Lev. 4:10). The word means “to smoke”.
- b) “Alah” used for the candlestick (Ex. 27:20). Of the offerings it is only used in the expression: “the firstfruits . . . but they shall not be burnt on the altar” (Lev. 2:12). The word means to ascend or be superior.
- c) “Saraph” used of the trespass and sin offerings (Lev. 4:12; 6:30). The word means to burn utterly.

In sharp contrast to the sacrifice on the brazen altar, or that outside the camp (Lev. 4:12), the fire utterly consumed the sacrifice. But, when our Lord as the sacrifice, He consumed the fire, providing us with an eternal salvation.

To be forsaken by God is an experience none of the ransomed will ever know. Christ knew that in the three hours of darkness when God made to meet upon Him the iniquity of us all. He was a man of sorrows feeling the weight and the horror of that which lay ahead of Him. How marvelous are the riches of Christ when He could step into my place, become my substitute, sustain the chastisement that was mine, and then make me righteous before God.

On the cross we see the:

- a) Vicarious Christ, suffering on behalf of another. (Isa. 53:5)
- b) Victorious Christ, shouting: "**It is finished**". (Jn. 19:31)

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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