

An Attempt To Listen To God

The Sides Of The

Brazen Altar

By

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## Introduction

In the reading of the Scriptures it is always interesting to note the seemingly little points God emphasizes. When the instructions concerning the altar were given God said: “Thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad” (Ex. 27:1). If the instructions stopped there the question could be asked: “What shape was the altar?” To some, who are interested in geometrical designs, they would say that they need more data because it could be a parallelogram, a rhombus, or a square! Turning to the passage again, God gives this little piece of data: “The altar shall be foursquare” (Ex. 27:1). Two matters are emphasized, it had four sides and it was square. Why is this important?

The answer is that when God emphasizes four of anything, He always divides it into a three and a one, or a two and a two. For instance:

- a) There are four gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke have the same perspective and much of the same data, John stands alone.
- b) In the meal offering there are four ingredients, flour, salt, and oil all are together, the frankincense is alone (Lev. 2:2, 13)
- c) When we read of Naaman, there are three positive and one negative. He was a great man, honorable, mighty of valor, and he was a leper! (2 Kgs. 5:1)
- d) Abraham built four altars. (Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:18; 22:9)
- e) Isaac dug four wells. (Gen. 26:19, 21, 22, 25)
- f) Jacob built four pillars. (Gen. 28:18; 31:45; 35:7, 20)
- g) An illustration of four things being divided into a two and a two is the gospels for Matthew and Luke. Both present the Lord as the son of man, whereas Mark and John present Him as the Son of God. Many other examples could be given.

With that in mind, how are the four sides of the altar divided? In reading about the altar it is observed that there is reference to north, south, and east sides, but not the West. There is another altar in the Tabernacle, the incense altar and it also is square and had four sides (Ex. 37:25), but the interesting thing about it is in contrast to the brazen altar, three are not mentioned, and only the right hand side, which was the North side (Lk. 1:11).

## The Universality of Salvation

A primary truth presented from this observation. Because the altar faced the four points of the compass, it indicated the universality of the offer and provision of salvation. We must never forget that Israel was to be a missionary people, to display before the world the power, exclusiveness, and holiness of God. In a day to come they will be the light (Isa. 42:6; 49:6) and God uses to call the nations (Isa. 45:22-23). In ancient days they failed in this, becoming on one hand isolationists by carrying their separation to extremes by man-made traditions (Matt. 15:2); and on the other hand becoming so like the nations they could not be missionaries. The fact still remains that salvation was to be universal and still is.

The scriptures say:

- a) “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16)
- b) “The Father sent the son to be the Saviour of the world” (1 Jn. 4:14)
- c) God “Who will have all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4)
- d) “The Lord . . . is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9)
- e) “For there in one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim. 2:5-6)
- f) “They shall come from the East, and from the West, and from the North, and from the South” (Lk. 13:29)
- g) “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Rev. 5:9)
- h) “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6)

- i) "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached . . . unto all nations" (Matt. 24:14)
- j) "And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8)
- k) "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mk. 16:15)

Is salvation available for the whosoever will, without exception or modification? Absolutely, for when God says "whosoever" He means what He says and says what He means.

Normally when the altar is being spoken of, attention is drawn to its size, emphasis being made on how big it was. However, by having measurements it also indicated limitations! We often speak of the laver. There are no measurements given which indicate it can never be curtailed, signifying the cleaning provided will never be lessened or limited in any way. When considering the salvation of which the altar speaks, it is limited, however **THIS IS NOT LIMITED ATONEMENT** which teaches Christ only died for the elect. There will not be a believer who will not fully agree with that which is presented here.

There are two major extremes which are easy to fall into, "limited atonement" and "universal salvation". One denies the efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ for the whosoever will, and the other denies the fact that rejection of Christ results in eternal damnation. There needs to be understood the little understood truth. Since God is righteous He will not exact punishment twice for the same crimes. As the hymn by Toplady says:

"From whence this fear and unbelief,  
Since God my Father, put to grief  
His spotless Son for me?  
Can he, the righteous judge of men,  
Condemn me for that debt of sin,  
Which, Lord, was charged on Thee?"

If Thou hast my discharge procured,  
And freely in my place endured  
The whole of wrath divine,  
Payment God will not twice demand,  
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,  
And then again at mine."

The argument is: "If Christ died as my substitute then God cannot righteously punish me!" There is sufficiency in Him to be the substitute for the whosoever will, but I can only say: "Christ is my substitute" when I accept Him as my Saviour. He died and suffered for my sins, but if I reject His work, I can never say that His work was not sufficient, and that He could not have been my substitute. Allow a faint illustration. My wife was doing some washing. There was lots of water in the dishwasher, and the powder was more than sufficient to clean all the clothes. However, if some clothes had decided they did not want to be clean, they could never blame the water or powder. There was sufficient for them. However, if they jumped into the washing machine they could say "It was sufficient for me". All can say is Christ died for me, but only those who are saved can truly say: "Christ is my substitute".

The altars sides, were North, South, East and West, thus it is precious to stand in Jerusalem, the center of the world, and know as the Lord was en-route to Jerusalem He said: "They shall come from the East, and from the West, and from the North and from the South" (Lk. 13:29). John pens it a different way: "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9). Even in the midst of tribulation days the gospel call goes out: "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Rev. 14:6).

This is astounding because of when it happens. It is at the time the world is enraptured by the beast who stands in rebellion against God, declaring himself to be God and sitting in His temple. In the face of such blatant rebellion

God is still seeking to reconcile people to Himself (Acts 2:21; 2 Thess. 2:4). The Lord said: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in . . . all nations” (Matt. 24:14), and before His ascension He gave a command and an assurance. The command was: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matt. 28:19), and the assurance was: “And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

### The Four Sides Of The Altar

When God gave the instructions for the sacrifices He said: “He shall kill it on the side of the altar northward” (Lev. 1:11), then: “He shall pluck away his crop with his feathers, and cast it beside the altar on the East part, by the place of the ashes” (Lev. 1:16). Nothing more is said about the other sides until Ezekiel writes: “And the waters came down from under from the right side of the house, at the South side of the altar” (Ezek. 47:1), and we never read of the West side where God dwelt. Visualizing a man wanting to come to God we would see him (as it were) walking round the altar. He would stand on the North side where the sacrifice was killed, foreshadowing the death of Christ. He moves to the East side where the ashes are, the place which has the evidence of a consumed sacrifice, indicating a finished work of judgment. Going to the South side from which side the river flows, foreshadows the Holy Spirit who bears witness to the glorification of Christ (Jn. 7:38-39), and man then goes to the West side where God dwells.

Considering these truths, in Romans we read:

- a) Christ who died, the North side (Rom. 8:34)
- b) That is risen again, the East side, the fire had been executed (Rom. 8:34)
- c) At the right hand of God, the South side (Rom.8:34)

### The North Side

How stark are the words “He shall kill it” (Lev. 1:11). A death can be described by several words: died, accident, murder, execution, or expiration. The end result is the same but the connotations are different. When it reads: “He shall kill it”, there is the thought of deliberate non sympathetic slaughtering. The words are used of our Lord and His death are:

- a) “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3)
- b) Ye “slew” (diacheirizomai) (Acts 5:30)
- c) “Ye killed (apokteinō) the Prince of life” (Acts 3:15)
- d) “Ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (anaireō) ( Acts 2:23)
- e) “Stood a Lamb as it had been slain” (sphazō) (Rev. 5:6)
- f) “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew” (katasphazō) (Acts 5:30)

Not being a Greek scholar, any books I have do not explain clearly enough the distinction between these words. I will leave that to another. What I have observed is that “Apokteinō” means to kill, “anaireō” to take away and destroy; “sphazō” to slay, and “katasphazō” to kill off. One can feel the savagery of man in these words: “He was hated, despised, and killed”.

At the moment of His death the Lord cried with a loud voice: “Father into Thy hands I commend my spirit” (Lk. 23:46). Three stupendous happenings occurred:

- a) “The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Matt. 27:51). It had a spiritual significance.
- b) “The earth did quake, and the rocks rent” (Matt. 27:51). It was a demonstration of divine power.
- c) “The graves were opened” (Matt. 27:52). It was a pledge that the strong man’s house had been invaded and was to fall (Mk. 3:27).

### The Rent Veil

For the priests in the temple the rending of the veil must have been a terrifying experience, for now there was nothing between them and God. The veil had hung as a separator between the two tabernacles (Heb. 9:1-5).

Within the second tabernacle, which was where God dwelt, man must not go except on the Day of Atonement (Heb. 9:7) on pain of death. Suddenly, seemingly “without blood”, they were in the holiest of all! They would not have understood the significance of the rending of the veil but later the inspired apostle will inform us that for the first time, the way into the holiest was opened (Heb. 9:8) for every priest to enter. All who were redeemed now have access to God, by the offering of the body of Christ the way into the holiest of all was opened (Heb. 10:19-20).

In preparation for the law to be given God’s command was: “Thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about” (Ex. 19:12). The manifestation of Divine holiness was not the place of curiosity as Moses learnt at the burning bush (Ex. 3:5). At Sinai the Lord told Moses: “Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze” (Ex. 19:21). Moses was himself terrified for it is recorded of him saying: “I exceedingly fear and quake” (Heb. 12:21). Now there were no boundaries to be kept, no command not to come near, no veil to show a separation, and man stood in the uncovered presence of God!

This veil was a woven fabric of seventy-two twisted plaits of twenty-four threads each, and was sixty feet long. It was not therefore a thin piece of material, and it was rent. This was the second of two material things rent. The high priest rent his clothes (Mk. 14:63), and the veil of the temple was rent. These were highly significant happenings for the rent veil signified the end of the ceremonial law and the sacrifices, and the rending of the priests garment signified the end of that priestly order.

### The Earthquake

The ancient people knew that earthquakes indicated the activity of God. It may have been for a manifestation of His holiness and intimidating power (Psa. 68:8; Jer. 10:10) of divine judgment (Isa. 29:6). Whatever its reason, it always indicated the voice of God.

### The Graves Were Opened

It is my thinking that there needs to be the understanding that there is a break in time between the graves being opened and the dead saints arising. We have all stood beside an “open grave”, and the tomb of Lazarus was opened when the stone was moved but none of these meant a resurrection happening immediately. That which it did was a clear message to the satanic kingdom that Christ had entered the realm of death, and in itself it became the pledge to that world of their defeat. Man could not see this, but God then by the opening of the graves gave the pledge that there would be a resurrection.

### The East side

The first observation is that the East side signifies the rising of the sun and a new day. Thank God for new beginnings. Scripture records: “And on the east side toward the rising of the sun shall they of the standard of the camp of Judah pitch throughout their armies: and Nahshon the son of Amminadab *shall be* captain of the children of Judah” (Num. 2:3); and again we read: “In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week” (Matt. 28:1). For those who saw and believed, the sun shone as never before, for there was the vacated tomb. The Lord had risen indeed. What a morning.

The ashes indicate that the fire is extinguished having consumed all it can consume. However, with our Lord He consumed the fire of divine judgment and the truths which tells me He finished the work are:

#### **1) His Triumphant Cry:**

- a) It is very beautiful to note that when the Lord voiced: “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani” it was with a loud voice (Matt. 27:46); when He was about to give up His spirit He cried with a loud voice: “Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit (Lk. 23:46). But when He said: “It is finished” “tetelestai” (Jn. 19:30), there is no reference to it being a loud voice, it is simply “He said”. That was not through weakness for the last cry was yet to come, and it was energetic. The whisper or still small voice of the Almighty has power beyond comprehension.

- b) The Greek word translated “finished” is a word used twice within three verses: “Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished” “tetelestai” (Jn. 19:28); “When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said: “It is finished”, “tetelestai” (Jn. 19:30). I am thankful He did not say “I am finished” as one who had tried and was exhausted and in defeat says “I am finished”. Neither did He say “It is almost finished” giving the idea that more was to be done. Gloriously He said: “It is finished”.
- c) What was finished?
- i) The years of His humiliation and rejection. How lovely to sing: “Tis past the dark and dreary night and Lord we hail Thee now, Our morning star without a cloud of sadness on Thy brow”.
  - ii) The burdened conscience because of sin could now be a thing of the past. (Heb. 10:2)
  - iii) The barring of the way into the holiest was removed. (Heb. 9:8)
  - iv) The maintaining of animal sacrifices which could never please God was over. (Heb. 10:6)
  - v) All the claims of divine righteousness have been fully answered in righteousness. (Rom. 3:26)
  - vi) All that is necessary for the full tide of God’s mercy, love, and grace to flow is opened. (Rom. 5:1-2, 8-11)
  - vii) The judgement is past and can never be repeated. (Heb. 9:26)

That which we are not told but must ponder is, what was the joyous exaltation in Heaven when this word was spoken, and what was the darkness that began to settle over the hosts of darkness? Since there is rejoining in the Heaven when a sinner is repentant (Lk. 15:7, 10); or when the great whore is destroyed (Rev. 19:1-4); what must it have been when Christ cried: “it is finished”?

## 2) **His Mighty Resurrection**

- a) There are a number of foreshadowings of the Lord’s resurrection, or of the truth of resurrection in the Old Testament:
- i) The man who was cast into Elijah’s grave. (2 Kgs. 13:20-21)
  - ii) The Shunammite lad. (2 Kgs. 4:34-35)
  - iii) The widow of Zarephath’s son. (1 Kgs. 17:23)
  - iv) Isaac (Heb. 11:19)
  - v) Jonah (Matt. 12:40)
  - vi) Firstfruits (Lev. 23:10-20; 1 Cor. 15:23)
- b) The prophetic predictions:
- i) When viewed as a prophecy. (Psa. 16:10)
  - ii) “He shall prolong His days”, comes AFTER, “when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin”. (Isa. 53:10)
  - iii) “He asked life of thee, and Thou gavest it Him, even life length of days for ever.” (Psa. 21:4)

Of course no one saw Christ rise from the dead, but He appeared seventeen times after it. For this consideration they are divided into two groups. The interesting thing about these first group of witnesses is they were all skeptics! Carefully read these statements and it will be found there was not an iota of belief in their hearts.

- a) Their unbelief:
- i) Some doubted (Matt. 28:17)
  - ii) “Then went in also that other disciple (John) . . . and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead” (Jn. 20:8-9). The vacated tomb assured John that Christ had risen from the dead.
  - iii) If Mary had believed He would rise would she have said: “Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him” (Jn. 20:15); or “They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher” (Jn. 20:2).
  - iv) “They, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.” (Mk. 16:11)
  - v) “He upbraided them with their unbelief.” (Mk. 16:14)
  - vi) “Their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.” (Lk. 24:11)
  - vii) “Peter . . . departed, wondering” (Lk. 24:12)

- viii) “Certain women also, of our company made us astonished” (Lk. 24:22)
- ix) “Certain of them which were with us . . . Him they saw not” (Lk. 24:24)
- x) They supposed they had seen a spirit (Lk. 24:37)

Appearances between the resurrection and ascension:

- a) To Mary Magdalene (Jn. 20:14-16)
- b) To the other women (Matt. 28:8-10; Mk. 16:11; Lk. 24:1-10)
- c) To Simon/Cephas (Lk. 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5)
- d) To the two on the road to Emmaus (Mk. 16:12-13; Lk. 24:13-31)
- e) To the ten in the upper room (Mk. 16:14; Lk 24:36; Jn. 20:19)
- f) To the disciples 8 days later, when Thomas was present (Jn. 20:26)
- g) To the disciples on the mountain on Galilee (Matt. 28:16-17)
- h) To the five hundred (1 Cor. 15:6)
- i) To James (1 Cor. 15:7)
- j) To those who were gathered at His ascension (Lk. 24:50-51)

Appearances between His ascension and coming again:

- a) To Stephen (Acts 7:56)
- b) To Saul (Acts 9:3-6; Gal. 1:12))
- c) To Ananias (Acts 9:10)
- d) To Paul when he was in the temple and being warned of the persecution that was to come (Acts 22:17-21; Gal. 1:8)
- e) To Paul when he was in prison in Caesarea (Acts 23:11) and the Lord told him that he would be a witness for Him in Rome.
- f) To John (Rev. 1:12-20)

### 3) His Ascension

There are seven words used to describe the ascension of our Lord. He was:

English Translation	Greek word	Reference	Significance
Taken up	Epauro	Acts 1:9	It is used to indicate that which is lifted up, used for the hoisting of a sail in (Acts 27:40). It is in the passive voice, indicating this was something another did.
Taken up	Analambano	Acts 1:2, 11	To take up, to take to ones self (Acts 7:43) and is the resultant action, that is, this is the end of the journey.
Carried up	Anaphero	Lk. 24:51	To bear or carry up
As He went up	Poreuomai	Acts 1:10	To go on a journey
Ascended up	Anabaino	Eph. 4:8, 10	To ascend
Received up	Analepsis	Lk. 9:51	To be taken up to be received
Received up	Hupolambano	Acts 1:9	As one supported by the cloud

- c) On that journey He went:
  - i) “Into heaven” (Acts 1:11)

- ii) "Passed into the heavens" (Heb. 4:14)
  - iii) "Higher than the heavens" (Heb. 7:26)
  - iv) Who "is gone into Heaven" (1 Pet. 3:22)
  - v) "Ascended up on high" (Eph. 4:8)
  - vi) "Ascended up far above all heavens" (Eph. 4:10)
- d) How high did He go up?
- i) "Set Himself down on the right hand of the Majesty on High" (Heb 1:3) (lit)
  - ii) "Set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1)
  - iii) "Set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2)
  - iv) "Sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:12)
  - v) "Sitting on the right hand of power" (Matt. 26:64)
  - vi) "Sit on the right hand of the power of God" (Lk. 22:69)
  - vii) "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:21)
- e) He went in as:
- i) A forerunner (Heb 6:19-20). In contrast to the high priests of the Old Testament who went into the holiest as representatives. None could follow them in there. Today we follow Him, there in spirit (Heb 10:19), but in the future in body. (1 Cor. 15:51-53)
- f) He went in by:
- i) "By His own blood" (Heb. 9:12). That is, He is set in contrast to the High Priest who went into the holiest of all by virtue of the blood of the animal, He by virtue of His own blood. We must not think that the Lord carried His blood into Heaven, the wording means: "By virtue of His own Blood".
- g) He went in and is now:
- i) In the position of honour and glory. (Psa. 110:1; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 8:1)
  - ii) The head of the church. (Col. 1:18)
  - iii) Bestower of spiritual gifts. (Eph. 4:7-8)
  - iv) The one who fills all things. (Eph. 4:9-10)
- By His ascension it signified:
- i) The end of His earthly ministry. Father had sent His Son into the world and now the Son was returning to the Father. The period of human limitation was at an end. (Jn. 13:1, 3)
  - ii) The success in His work, for He had finished to God's satisfaction the work given Him to do. (Acts 10:40)
  - iii) The "beginning", if such a term could be used, of His exaltation by the Father. (Eph. 1:20-23)
  - iv) His being given a name above all names. (Phil. 2:9)
  - v) He had gone to prepare a place for us. (Jn. 14:2)
  - vi) His new work as our High Priest. (Heb. 4:14-16)
  - vii) Was the prototype of His return (Acts 1:11). He left visually, physically, and in clouds.

### **The South Side**

Ezekiel informs us that the river flows out from the South side of the altar (Ezek. 47:1). This is within the context of Ezekiel dealing with millennial glory and the blessing of God. Interestingly our Lord used the metaphor of a river when He said: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified". (Jn. 7:37-39)

As mentioned, no one saw Christ rise from the dead but they saw the evidences of it. However, men saw Him go



up and a cloud received Him out of their sight. But how do they know He went into Heaven? True, the angels said so (Acts 1:11), but the greater evidence is the coming of the Holy Spirit. Because He came we have:

- a) The confirmation that the Lord had ascended to the Father. (Jn. 15:26)
- b) The full canon of scripture for the Lord said: “When He the Spirit of truth is come He will:
  - i) “Guide you into all truth” (Jn. 16:13)
  - ii) “Shew you things to come” (Jn. 16:13)
  - iii) “Bring all things to your remembrance” (Jn. 14:26)
- c) He is the One who convicts the unsaved, for the Lord said: “When He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” (Jn. 16:7-11)

### **The West Side**

As was noted in the introduction, there is no mention of the West side and I make two suggestions. Since both are based on an understanding from the Scriptures, they are only my suggestions.

- a) In the Tabernacle man came in with his back toward the East facing west, and at the westerly end of the Tabernacle was where God dwelt. Thus, when I come to the West I can go no further for I have come to God.
- b) The other suggestion is based on the following verses:
  - i) “From the rising of the sun, and from the West” (Isa. 45:6)
  - ii) “From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same” (Mal. 1:11). The sun goes down in the West indicating the end of the day.

Thank God there will never be a day when the death of Christ, His finished work or glorification, will ever come to an end.

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

Rowan Jennings, Abbotsford, British Columbia