

Message #55

Exodus 27:1-8

In a variety of ways throughout the O.T., God taught His people that the only way they could have a relationship with Him was through a substitution sacrifice that He deemed as acceptable.

This started clear back in the book of Genesis. Right from the beginning God taught Adam and Eve that if any sinful person was to have a relationship with Him, something must die as a substitute so that the people could live.

This all pointed of course to Jesus Christ. This all prefigured Him and what He would do in order to save us.

When God designed the sanctuary, it was critical that His people realize this point right up front. **So He specifically demanded that there be an altar so that animal sacrifices could be made.** This altar would be located just yards away from the very Presence of God and it was impossible to get into the presence of God by bypassing this altar.

Now what this altar actually turns out to be is a very large outdoor grill. The animal needed to be killed in the presence of God and then it needed to be cooked in the presence of God and in order for that to happen, there needed to be a big outdoor grill, which is called the “Bronze Altar.”

In this section we come to a very important part of the sanctuary and that was the construction of the altar. Actually, there are two different altars that are to exist in this sanctuary—the altar on which there would be offered burnt offerings and the altar on which there would be offered incense.

GOD REQUIRED THAT HIS SANCTUARY INCLUDE A BRONZE ALTAR IN ORDER TO OFFER BURNT OFFERINGS AND WITHOUT THIS NO ONE GOT INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

Anytime any person was in this sanctuary complex, they had to see this altar. Anytime a priest went into the sanctuary, he had to walk right by this altar. This altar teaches that you cannot possibly get into the presence of God without the purity that is needed in a sacrifice that has been offered. If one is going into the presence of God, sin must be addressed and it must be forgiven.

Now as with the other items, God gives His careful specs concerning the construction of these things. Notice at the end of **verse 8** that this was to be made in accordance with what God showed Moses in the mountain. So we may speculate as to what this altar looked like, but the truth is without Moses to confirm it, we don't actually know for sure.

There are at least eleven specs brought out about this altar:

SPEC #1 – The altar is to be made of acacia wood. **27:1a**

Now as we have pointed out many times, acacia wood is a very tough wood. It is a hardwood that is extreme. This altar made of acacia wood was to be overlaid with bronze (**27:2b**). Obviously the overlay of bronze would protect the wood from catching fire and protect it from being burned up.

Now in view of the amount of sacrifices, we may assume that this bronze had a charred look to it. The heat of the fire would certainly create a charred look to this altar. There would be nothing beautiful about it like inside the tent in the presence of God. But without this place of sacrifice, you do not get into the presence of God.

There is nothing pretty to look at when looking at any place of sacrifice. There is nothing pretty about a Roman cross. It is made of non glamorous looking wood that is all polished and nice. But without this old rugged cross you cannot and will not be saved.

SPEC #2 – The altar is to be 90 inches long (5 cubits) and 90 inches wide (5 cubits). **27:1b**

This means that this altar is 7.5 feet long and 7.5 feet wide. Now it is no mere coincidence that this altar is bigger than the mercy seat. We may recall that the mercy seat was 2.5 cubits long and 1.5 cubits wide. So the altar is twice as long as the mercy seat and over three times as wide as the mercy seat.

Why is this? Because this shows us that it is the shed blood of the sacrifice that is paramount to the grace and mercy of God. In other words, the big entrance into the grace and mercy of God and entrance to the Word of God is this sacrifice. Miss this and you miss it all.

The whole idea behind this altar is there must be a sacrifice in order to gain entrance into the riches of God.

SPEC #3 – The altar was to be designed as a perfect square. **27:1c**

There have been altars discovered that are round and an Assyrian altar was discovered in Nineveh that was triangular. This altar was to be perfectly square. When Solomon built the temple, he made certain that the altar was a perfect square (II Chronicles 4:1)

SPEC #4 – The altar was to be 54 inches high (3 cubits). **27:1d**

This means the altar was to be 4.5 feet high. So what we have here is a square altar that is 7.5 feet long and wide and 4.5 feet high.

SPEC #5 – The altar was to contain a horn on each corner. **27:2**

Now the horn was to be made as one piece with the altar and it was to be overlaid with bronze.

This was a curved protrusion that extended upward at each corner. The horns were not affixed to the altar as a removable part, but were built into the actual structure.

Now of course this is curious because we must wonder what exactly is the purpose of having these horns on the altar? As one commentator said, there are “voluminous discussions” about the design, form and purpose of these horns.

Are they some mere decoration, kind of like those ranchers who put longhorn steer horns on the front of their cars? Or is there a function and reason for it?

We may conclude from Psalm 118:27 that one of the purposes of these horns was so that one could tie off the animals about to be sacrificed. Think about that for a moment. You bring your animal who will give its life for your sins and you have to look for a while at that animal that is about to be slaughtered. I don't know if you have ever had to have a pet you loved put down, but this is heart-wrenching. It is heart-wrenching to look at this and to think about this.

We know that the blood of bulls and goats and lambs and rams could never take away sin; it could only cover sin. But we also know that every one of these sacrifices prefigured Jesus Christ. Each sacrificial animal represented Jesus Christ. So as heart-wrenching as it is to think of seeing your animal dying, think about seeing Jesus Christ dying for us.

We also know from Exodus 29:12 that blood was to be put on these horns, so there must be some type of redemptive symbolism in this. We do know that “horns” are often used in Scripture to describe powerful nations and powerful leaders. For example, we learn in Revelation that ten horns represent ten kings and ten nations (Rev. 17:12).

It certainly is possible that these horns speak to the fact that the only way any person from any nation whether north, south, east or west will ever get into the presence of God is through the blood sacrifice that is given at the precise spot authorized by God. You could not offer a blood sacrifice in the spot of your choosing; it had to be in the spot of God's choosing, which in this context was at this altar.

One other observation we need to observe. The people who would offer these blood sacrifices at this altar were already believers. In other words, believers needed to offer these sacrifices because even though they were believers, they were still sinners.

Now the only authorized place where God will accept a blood sacrifice is a place that existed 2000 years ago. The only spot God will accept is the cross of Jesus Christ and the only blood that God will accept is the blood shed by His Son.

Now the strength of the shed blood of Jesus Christ is that it completely washes away our sin. When we sin as a believer, all we need to do is confess that sin and that shed blood “cleanses us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

SPEC #6 – The altar was to have various utensils made of bronze. **27:3**

There were to be pails for removing ashes, shovels, basins, forks and fire pans. I want you to notice that all nouns are plural. So we needed more than just one utensil of each kind. All of these things were to be made of bronze. All of these things were designed by God and each had their purpose.

Ash pots would receive and store ashes; fire pans would hold and transport live coals for the fire; shovels would remove ashes and reconfigure the hot coals. The bowls or basins contained various liquid and would catch draining blood. The forks would handle the meat. If some piece of the sacrifice fell or needed to be moved, the forks would do it.

SPEC #7 – The altar was to have a bronze grate that sat on top of the altar. **27:4a**

A large grate was to be made that apparently would sit near the top of the altar. It was to contain a network, like a grill network, with four bronze rings on each corner. Those rings would slide over the horns and hold the grate on the grill.

SPEC #8 – The altar was to have a net on which there were four rings at four corners. **27:4b-5**

Apparently there was a bronze net down inside the altar, probably about halfway down. So we have a net halfway down inside the altar and a grate sitting near the top of the altar. The bronze net would hold the coals for the fire and the grate would cook the animal.

So the net was under the ledge of the altar about halfway down and the grate was on top at the ledge level.

So the ashes would sink through the grating and fall into the fire pans that were there to collect the ashes.

SPEC #9 – The altar was to have poles in order to transport it and lift it. **27:6**

The poles were to be made of acacia wood and overlaid with bronze. Now when the ashes reached a certain level, you would need to clean them out and in order to do that, there needed to be a way to lift the altar so things could be cleaned out. These poles would enable that to happen.

SPEC #10 – The altar poles were to be inserted into the rings when it is carried or lifted. **27:7**

The poles could be slid into the rings so that the altar could be transported.

SPEC #11 – The altar was to be a hollow, lightweight altar. **27:8**

Now archeology has actually uncovered these kinds of altars. Although the specific altar of the tabernacle has not been discovered, others designed like it have been discovered.

In 1974 a horned altar was found in Tel Dan. In Arad, not only was another altar found that had horns, but it is exactly five cubits square. Another altar was found at Beersheba. So what all of this says is that Israel knew about this altar and knew about the importance of a sacrifice as a means of getting into the presence of God.

According to Amos, when the Babylonians came into Bethel, they cut the horns off the altar and probably destroyed it (Amos 3:14).

Now in Exodus 29:37 we learn that when the complete atoning sacrifice had been made on this altar (7 days–7 is the number of completion), whoever or whatever “touched” the altar shall be holy.

This imagery tells us this—you will never get into heaven until you have touched the altar. You will never have a chance of entering into the presence of God until by faith you have been to the Old Rugged Cross.