

March 11, 2018 - Ex. 26:31 – 27:19 - The Brazen Altar and the Court
Torah Reading: Exodus 26:31 – 27:19 - The Brazen Altar and the Court
Psalm 61
Haftarah: Ezekiel 16:10-19, 60

[We accidentally covered Exodus 26 through the end of the chapter previously]

The Brazen Altar - Exodus 27:1-8

Why an Altar?

The Hebrew root for "altar" - *mizbeach* - comes from a root *zabach* meaning "to slay" or "slaughter." It is a place of sacrifice.

- **Hebrews 9:22** - "And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."

Sacrifice - originally seen in the coats of skins provided by God to Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3:21**), and later in the offering from the flock by Abel in **Genesis 4:4-5** - is the great foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

The Brazen Altar and its offerings were continuously "preaching the gospel."

Ezekiel 18:4 - "the soul that sins shall die."

Paul, echoing this, said, "the wages of sin is death." (**Romans 6:23**)

The sacrifice stood in for the offerer as a substitute for his own death.

This is shown by the offerer pressing down with his whole force on the head of the animal and confessing his sins, placing them symbolically on the animal. The animal died, and its blood was poured at the base of the altar, and some blood daubed on the horns of the altar.

This "covered" the offerer from God's wrath. One life was given as a substitute for another.

- **Psalm 32:1-2** - "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."

But this altar and these sacrifices were only a type, looking forward to a perfect offering and a perfect substitute.

- **Hebrews 10:3-5** - "Instead, those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sins. Therefore, when

Christ came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You prepared for me."

Altar Materials and location

Exodus 27:1-2 - "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. 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."

Brass

Bronze or brass symbolizes judgment in the Bible. The fire symbolized God's continual requirement for justice. The offerings were what satisfied that requirement.

Deuteronomy 32:4 - "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment (just): a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."

His anger is directed at sin:

Deuteronomy 32:22 - "For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains."

The offerings and sacrifices put off that judgment until the perfect offering and our perfect substitute was offered on the cross,, of which the Brazen Altar was a type.

The Brazen Altar was located in the courtyard just outside the Tabernacle tent. The Bronze Laver (which we haven't read about yet) was between the Brazen Altar and the entry of the Tabernacle tent.

It was in two separate pieces - a shittim wood box-like frame overlaid with bronze plates and a bronze grate that was placed inside.

Possibly sides of the grate extended under the frame to provide a draft for the flames. The grate came up halfway to the top of the altar.

Horns of shittim wood were fashioned for the corners. The wooden frame and horns were then overlaid with bronze.

Not mentioned here is an earthen ramp leading up to the altar, "separated from the altar by a hairbreadth" according to the Talmud (Tractate Zevachim 62b).

"An altar of earth you shall make for Me" (**Exodus 20:21-23**): "And you shall not ascend with steps."

Blood from the sacrifices would be sprinkled by a priest on two corners at the lower half

of the altar, some daubed on the horns, and the rest poured at its base. Here all the sacrifices and burnt offerings were placed and consumed in the fire, the smoke going up to God.

Connected with the Altar of Incense

Isaiah 6:5-7 - "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

This is a picture of how the priests took coals from the altar to kindle the fire of the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place.

The coals had been touched by the blood of the sacrifice!

Coals from this altar were carried to the Altar of Incense inside the Tabernacle to kindle that fire. When Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu kindled their own censers rather than using coals from the Brazen Altar, "there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them." (**Leviticus 10:1-7**)

Symbolically, the incense (our prayers to God, and generally all our thoughts) must be "kindled" with coals touched by the blood of Christ's sacrifice in order to be accepted by Him. Isaiah's "lips" are just a representation of his whole thought process.

Toward the end of his writings, Isaiah returns to this picture:

Isaiah 50:10-11 - "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow (torment)."

It all starts, though, with a realization: "Woe is me!"

We must keep that before us, whenever we make ourselves the "subject of our own sentence."

The Horns of the Altar

Horns symbolize strength and power in the Bible and generally in the ancient world.

- **Psalms 18:2** - "The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high

tower."

- **Psalm 75:10** - "All the horns of the wicked also will I cut off; but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted."

- **Psalm 92:10** - "But my horn hast Thou exalted like the horn of the wild-ox"

- **Luke 1:69** - Zacharias speaking about Jesus said: "And (God) hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David"

The four horns of the altar promised that the offerings would be mighty and effective to achieve their purpose, and the One who the sacrifices foreshadowed would finish His work of redemption by blood permanently.

- **Hebrews 10:14** - "For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."

A Living Sacrifice

The Brazen Altar is experienced within us as we go to the cross. Being in Christ, we then become a "sweet savor" offering, a whole burnt offering which God accepts.

Romans 12:1-2 - "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. 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."

A saying from the Zohar: "Worthy is the portion of the righteous, who offer every day this offering before the Lord; and what is it?, "their bodies and their souls," which they offer before him." (Zohar in Lev. fol. 4. 2.)'

"by the mercies of God" - Only in response to God's unearned and undeserved grace and mercy could be imagine offering ourselves as a living sacrifice.

"reasonable" = *logikos* - a service rendered by the reason (which has authority over the body "soma").

Not service required or demanded by logic, but rather service rendered *through* our reason/logos - and more importantly, through the power of the Logos/Christ.

"service" = *latreia* - priestly service of worship in the tabernacle or temple (**Exodus 12:25** in LXX)

It's not "reasonable." Our natural reason would lead us in the opposite direction. But

with a mind renewed from above (*anakainōsis*), the Holy Spirit opens our heart to the possibility of being a living sacrifice. Our response of gratitude for God's mercy directs our reason or will, and then it's demonstrated in the body through our actions..

See **Romans 6:13** - "Yield yourselves unto God, and your bodies as instruments of righteousness unto Him."

And **1 Corinthians 6:20** - "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and spirit, which are His"

Just as the body expresses outwardly the manifestation of self-seeking, so it will express God's righteousness and grace - in praise to Him, fellowship with one another, and good works toward humankind.

- **Hebrews 13:15-16** - "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate (*koinōnia*) forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Considering the type of Christ as the Logos/Word, it can be translated as "spiritual service." It is an action taken "in Christ" and empowered by the Logos of God.

- **1 Peter 2:2** - "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word (*logikos*) that ye may grow thereby"

- **1 Peter 2:5** - "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual (*pneumatikos*) sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

The Tabernacle Court - Exodus 27:9-18

Although the later Temple's court was paved with marble, and its Holy Place was paved with gold, the Tabernacle Court rested on bare earth and its courtyard was the sand of the desert - A picture of Christ as "a root out of a dry ground" (**Isaiah 53:2**)

The court surrounds the Tabernacle, enclosing a rectangular area of less than a fourth the size of a football field. Not big, just a place for the priests to conduct their service. In the later Temple this single courtyard would be divided into three parts - the Court of Women, the Court of Israel (for men only) and the Court of Priests nearest to the Holy Place. Surrounding this would be the larger Court of Gentiles, open to all.

"How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord" (**Psalms 84:1, 2**)

In contrast to the dark goats-skin tents in which the people encamped around the Tabernacle, the linen wall surrounding the courtyard was made of dazzling white linen

hangings.

Christ's Body

Exodus 27:14-15 - "The hangings of one side of the gate shall be fifteen cubits: their pillars three, and their sockets three. And on the other side shall be hangings fifteen cubits: their pillars three, and their sockets three."

"side" = *katheph* - side or shoulder. The layout of the Tabernacle is a picture of a body of a man, Christ.

Pillars

These hangings were upheld by 60 pillars about 7 1/2 feet tall, probably of shittim wood and set in sockets of brass (symbolizing the judgment/justice of God's wrath that Christ endured for us).

- **Song of Solomon 3:6-8** - "Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchants? Behold his bed, which is Solomon's; three score (60) valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war: every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night."

The image is of the Bridegroom being carried on a "bed" (a litter, a temporary resting place) in the wilderness, cloaked in a pillar of smoke, like the smoke on Mount Sinai, "perfumed with myrrh and frankincense" as in the incense altar, surrounded by 60 "valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel."

The pillars represent a defense, keeping holy everything inside the perimeter of the courtyard, which those outside could not see. At the same time they manifest the strength and sufficiency of that refuge into which the believing sinner has fled. They tell us it is the grace that reigns in righteousness by Christ Jesus that is our defense - seen in the white linen curtains which they literally "hold up."

- **Romans 8:33** - "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."

By faith only could you enter in to the courtyard, and only after bringing a sin offering that would cover your guilt and God's wrath.

In fact, God *chooses* who enters:

"Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy Courts" (**Psalms 65:4**)

"Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His Court with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name" (**Psalms 100:4**).

The 60 pillars rested on sockets of brass or bronze. As a whole, then, they represented Christ himself with 'feet like brass.'

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

Hooks and Fillets

Exodus 27: 11 - "...the hooks of the pillars and their fillets of silver."

Silver represents redemption bought by Christ's blood. The silver holds together the enclosure around the courtyard. The fillets were either rods of silver or a silver wire giving stability to the structure. The white linen curtains of His righteousness are connected to the pillars resting in brass sockets of judgment by the silver rods or wire of his redemption price - His blood.

The Gateway and its Veil

Exodus 27:16 - "And for the gate of the court shall be an hanging of twenty cubits, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework: and their pillars shall be four, and their sockets four."

- **John 10:9** - "I am the Door, by Me if any man enter in he shall be saved."

- **John 14:6** - "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

The old Spiritual says, "So high you can't get over it, So low you can't get under it, So wide you can't get around it, You gotta come in at the door."

The curtains of the Courtyard Gate are the same as for the Tabernacle entry. These are not raised, but completely block entry, making the courtyard itself invisible to those outside. Only after offering a sin offering could an Israelite pass through.

The Pins or Tent Pegs

Lastly, the lowly pins or tent pegs - holding up the pillars around the courtyard - were brass, also symbolizing God's judgment, which Christ's sacrifice absorbed on the cross. God's judgment means the wall around the courtyard cannot be breached.

The pins were also used in giving tautness and stability to the Tabernacle coverings.

The same word for pin or peg or nail (*yathed* - tent peg) is used to represent the stable governance of Messiah, the Cornerstone, who will rule with a rod of iron.

The Peg/Nail/Pin points to Christ.

- **Zechariah 10:4** - "Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor (stern ruler) together."

The Targum translates this as, "out of him his Messiah."

"Christ is the cornerstone; Christ is the nail fixed in the wall, whereby all vessels are supported. The word of Christ is the bow, whence the arrows rend the king's enemies."
- Osorius, student of Augustine of Hippo

See also **Isaiah 22:22-23** - "Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open. I will drive him like a peg (*yathed*) in a firm place, And he will become a throne of glory to his father's house."

"exactors" or stern rulers = *nagas* - Usually means a tyrant. But also used in a good sense as here:

Isaiah 60:17 - "And I will make peace your administrators and righteousness your overseers."

Christ from the point of view of His enemies will *seem* tyrannical:

Revelation 2:27 - "And from His mouth proceeds a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God, the Almighty."