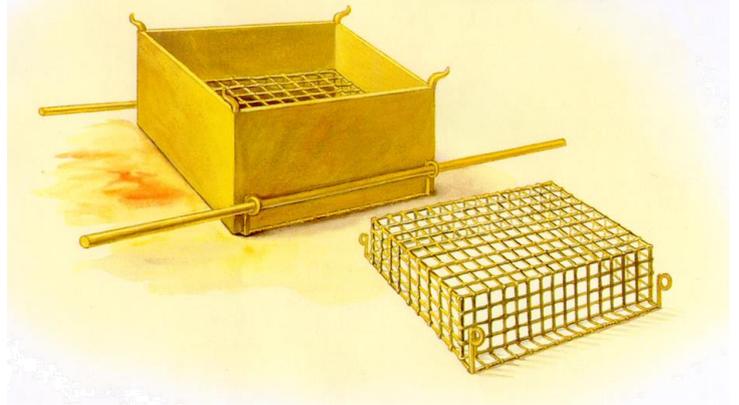


The Brazen Altar

Scripture	Main Theme	Description/Notes
Exodus 27.1-8	The Brazen Altar	

The Construction

The Altar was constructed of shittim wood overlaid with brass (or, copper). It was foursquare; five cubits long and five cubits wide (7.5 feet, 2.3 metres) with a height of three cubits (4.5 feet, 1.4 metres). Four horns were located on the corners of the Altar to secure and bind the sacrifice in place (Psalm 118.27). There was a grate or network of brass (v.5) inside the Altar about half-way up. The sacrifice was placed on this grate. When the sacrifice was consumed by fire, any ashes would fall through the grate to the bottom of the hollow altar and removed. Again, provision was made to carry the Altar with rings and staves.



The altar had several accompanying implements:

- Shovels – to handle the ashes or whatever was removed from the Altar;
- Pans – to receive the ashes;
- Basins – for the blood of the sacrifices;
- Fleshhooks – for handling the carcasses of the offerings;
- Firepans – for use with the fire of the Altar, possibly used to carry coals to the Golden Altar for offering incense.

The Use

The word altar comes from a root meaning ‘to slaughter’, ‘kill’, ‘sacrifice’. On a regular basis animals were slain and laid upon the Altar as an offering to God (cf. Leviticus 1-5). These offerings were to help God’s people show an appreciation to Lord for His goodness towards them (worship) and to ensure cleansing and a covering for their sins (atonement).

The Brazen Altar was central to the service of the Tabernacle. Offerings were made on a regular basis and the Altar was a most important component of these. Offerings brought were:

- The daily offerings every morning and evening (Exodus 29.38-42);
- Sweet savour offerings: burnt offerings, meal offerings, peace offerings (Leviticus 1-3);
- Non sweet savour offerings: sin offerings and trespass offerings (Leviticus 4-5);
- After the birth of a child (Leviticus 12.6-8);
- On the cleansing of a leper (Leviticus 14.1-32);
- On the cleansing of physical ailments (Leviticus 15.13-15, 28-30).

The Brazen Altar was first used during the consecration ceremony of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood (Leviticus 8). At this time God kindled the fire on the Altar, which was never again to be put out (Leviticus 6.13, 9.24).

The Significance

Sacrifice: The Brazen Altar was a place of sacrifice. It is therefore a picture of the work of Christ on the cross. We must note that despite the continual sacrifice of millions, the Scripture says: *And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins* (cf. Hebrews 10). All of this would point forward to the one single sacrifice that would take away sins: *But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God* (Hebrews 10.12).

Blood: *“Continually the smoke rose, the flames consumed the sacrifice, victims were slain, and blood was poured out. Death had its stamp on everything.”* Leviticus 8 records the first use of the Brazen Altar and emphasises its connection

with blood. The blood of a sin offering was put on the horns of the Altar and poured out at its base. The blood of two rams (burnt and consecration offerings) was sprinkled “upon the altar round about.” (Leviticus 8.19).

This Altar cannot be disconnected from blood! There is no saving power except by blood, no atonement or propitiation except by blood (Leviticus 17.11, Hebrews 9.22). The shedding of blood speaks of life given up (Leviticus 17.11). On this Altar, the life of the innocent animal was given instead of the offerers. Its blood was shed, death occurred and atonement was made.

Fire: God made the initial fire for this Altar, after which it was never to be put out. Fire is a symbol of wrath and God’s judgment upon sin. No “strange” or man-made fire was allowed on the Altar. This demonstrates that man had no part in what was accomplished at Calvary. Christ exhausted the fire of God and provided eternal salvation for us. The fire was never to go out speaking of the abiding worth of the work of Christ at Calvary. Salvation is freely available for all.

Location: There was no approach to the Tabernacle except by way of this Altar. Until the sinner stops at this Altar and accepts the sacrifice as a substitute there is no further progress. The Brazen Altar could not be avoided or ignored. It loomed large.

This Altar was the meeting place of God and His people (Exodus 29.42-43, 40.6-7). Today the cross is the meeting place between God and the guilty sinner. There is no other ground on which God can righteously forgive sins (Exodus 29.37).

The Altar was located on elevated ground (cf. Leviticus 9.22). This would remind us of the fact that Christ was “lifted up” (John 3.14, 1 Peter 2.24).

Materials: this speaks of the incorruptible humanity of the Lord Jesus. The tree could grow in hostile, desert conditions whilst displaying the beauty of yellow, fragrant flowers. The wood was overlaid with brass speaking of the One who was able to withstand and endure the judgment of God which fell upon Him. The brass covered the Shittim wood beneath and dissipated the heat. Likewise, Christ alone endured the fire of God’s righteousness at Calvary, yet He wasn’t consumed.

Hebrews 12.2: Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Dimensions: The Altar was five cubits long and wide. Five is the number of responsibility and grace. In the Altar is seen the work of the One who met every responsibility which was His, living a perfect life and finishing His work.

The number five also speaks of the grace of God. God’s grace is here seen in its length (“before the world began”, 2 Timothy 1.9) and its breadth reaching out to all (cf. 2 Corinthians 8.9). The Altar was foursquare, equally extending to the north, south, east and west. This signifies the work of Christ at Calvary as being equally available to all. There are no shortcomings in the Altar, and all can access it from any direction, although entry is only by one gate.

Horns: These are a symbol of power or strength (Habakkuk 3.4). The power of the work of Christ at Calvary is unparalleled (Romans 1.16, 1 Corinthians 1.18). In virtue of His work, He has the ability to change lives, forgive sins, save to the uttermost!

The horns of the Altar also provided a place that person could flee and cling to if someone was seeking his life (e.g. Adonijah, 1 Kings 1.50, 2.28). Praise God lost sinners can flee to the Altar and find there mercy and refuge from the adversary.

The Utensils: The pans were used in receiving the ashes of the offering and removing them “without the camp unto a clean place” (Leviticus 6.10-11). The consuming of the sacrifice and the resulting ashes showed that the fire had done its work and the sacrifice had been accepted by God (cf. Genesis 4.3-5, 1 Kings 18.38, 2 Chronicles 7.1, *Psalm 20.3: And thy burnt-offering doth reduce to ashes, or ‘accept’*). The Lord Jesus testified to the fact that the work was “finished” before laying down His life. His body was buried outside the “camp” of Jerusalem in a new tomb where no man had yet been laid.

The grate was fixed inside the centre of the Altar. This speaks of the inward sufferings of the Lord Jesus as He endured the wrath of God (cf. “in His own body”, 1 Peter 2.24). He experienced God’s righteous judgment in His inmost soul (Psalm 22.14, 40.12, 69.20, 26, 102.3-4, 9-10).