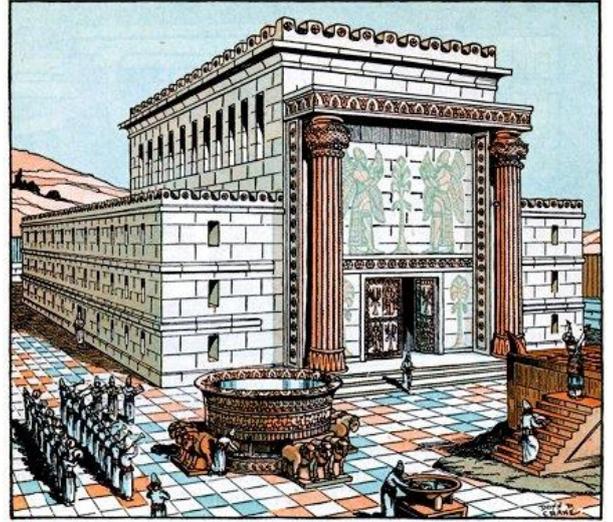


The Brazen Altar & Molten Sea

The Brazen Altar (2 Chronicles 4.1)

In the accounts of Solomon's Temple, the Brazen Altar is mentioned in only one verse (2 Chronicles 4.1). The altar was 20 cubits long (10m), 20 cubits wide (10m) and 10 cubits high (5m). Brazen Altars are also to be found in the Tabernacle (Exodus 27.1) and Ezekiel's Temple (Ezekiel 43.13-17), although they are different in size.

The Altar speaks of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. The Altar was made of brass which signifies the Lord Jesus as the One who endured great suffering. All the vessels outside the Temple building were made of brass, whilst the vessels within the Temple were made of gold. *William Kelly: 'Gold is the righteousness of God for drawing near where God is; brass is the righteousness of God for dealing with man's evil where man is.'* The Altar was also exactly the same dimensions as the Holy of Holies (2 Chronicles 3.8) suggesting that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus completely and



entirely met the claims of a Holy God against sin. Access is now available into His presence. *WW Fereday: 'The sacrifice of Christ is equal to the demands of holiness.'* There was no other vessel which could compare in size to the Altar. So also, there is nothing quite so great to meditate upon as the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus (Galatians 6.14).

The Molten Sea (1 Kings 7.23-26, 2 Chronicles 4.2-5)

The Molten Sea was round with an ornate lip ('brim') decorated with 'flowers of lilies' (1 Kings 7.26). The circumference of the Sea was 30 cubits (15m) and it measured 10 cubits (5m) in diameter. It was 5 cubits (2.5m) high (excluding its pedestal) and made of bright (scoured) brass of four finger-widths thick (1 Kings 7.26, 45). The whole Sea stood on the backs of twelve oxen which faced north, south, east and west (1 Kings 7.25, 2 Chronicles 4.4). There appears to have been a decoration of 'knops' and figures of oxen in two rows beneath the brim (1 Kings 7.24, 2 Chronicles 4.3). The purpose of the Sea was for the priests to obtain water to wash their hands and feet before entering the Temple. In type, it pictures the cleansing power of the Word of God.

The Materials

The Molten Sea was made of brass. Brass is the symbol of 'divine righteousness demanding judgment upon sin (as seen in the Brazen Altar) or demanding judgment upon uncleanness (as seen in the Brazen Sea)'. The Lord Jesus is described as having 'feet like unto fine brass' (Revelation 1.15) as He walked in the midst of the lampstands. He cannot and will not tolerate uncleanness and defilement amongst His people; rather He will trample it beneath His feet. Note that the brass is 'bright' or 'scoured' brass (1 Kings 7.45). There is no sin or uncleanness which the bright, shining **light** of the Word cannot **reveal**. Praise God, there is also no sin or uncleanness which the **scouring** effect of the Word cannot **cleanse**. We must allow the scouring to do its work so we might ever shine brighter for our God. The Laver in the Tabernacle was constructed with 'looking glasses' (i.e. mirrors). These would give a true reflection of the person who approached, just as the Word of God exposes our failures and faults as we read it.

The Contents

When full, the Sea could hold 'three thousand baths' (63,000 litres), but normally contained two thousand (1 Kings 7.26, cf. 2 Chronicles 4.5). *The Altar is brass in connection with **blood**. The Sea is brass in connection with **water**.* Both of these point to the Lord Jesus as the One from whose pierced side came 'blood and water' (John 19.34, cf. 1 John 5.6).

Both blood and water speak of cleansing through the death of the Lord Jesus (1 John 1.7, 1 Corinthians 6.11, Ephesians 5.26). Blood speaks of cleansing from guilt by **justification**, water speaks of cleansing from defilement by **sanctification**. Blood speaks of His death for the eye of God having cleansed us **judicially**. Water speaks of His death for the eye of man having cleansed us **morally**. We have **been** saved from the **penalty** of our sins (blood on the Brazen Altar) and are **being** saved from the **power** of sin (water in the Molten Sea). Blood also speaks of life laid down, water, of life imparted. The blood is applied *once and for all*. I am justified. However, the water is applied in *two different ways*. Firstly, I am bathed in water and washed all over. I have been morally cleansed (by the imparting of a new nature) and sanctified. Secondly, the water is to be applied daily to my hands and my feet in order to ensure my practical cleansing and sanctification from the defilement of living in this world. The moral cleansing by the water needs to be continual. I need the cleansing effect of the Word of God day by day.

This truth is illustrated in the sanctification of the priests (Leviticus 8) and by the words of the Lord Jesus (John 13). At the consecration ceremony of the priests (Leviticus 8) they were washed all over once, by **another** (namely Moses). This speaks of full and complete moral cleansing effected by the Word of God (John 3.5, Titus 3.5). However, there was also a continual, **personal** washing of hands and feet which took place whenever the priest was to enter the Holy Place or ascend the Altar to sacrifice (Exodus 30.19-21). The priests could not serve God unless they had so washed: *Exodus 30.20: When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD.* What a serious matter! This continual washing speaks of the application of the Word of God to our hearts by the Spirit of God (John 17.17, Psalm 119.9, Ephesians 5.26). We must allow the Word of God to cleanse our work (hands) and walk (feet) before we can dare offer spiritual sacrifices unto God by Christ.

The Lord Jesus speaks of these two 'washings' in John 13. We have been 'washed' or 'bathed' all over (John 13.10) which signifies our new birth. This has made us meet for the presence of God by **nature**, but we must also be meet in **practice** if we would enjoy His presence. We need the washing of feet (John 13.10)! *'Let the water and the blood, from thy riven side which flowed, be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.'* If a priest's hands and feet had become defiled he only needed to wash with water to enable him to discharge his priestly functions. If a believer fails and commits sins he only needs the cleansing action of the Word of God whereby the Holy Spirit applies to our hearts the remembrance of what Christ has done. The great size of the bath indicates the mighty provision to meet every possible defilement a believer may encounter. *I am no longer viewed as a sinner having to do with God as Judge. I am now in the position of a child having to do with God as Father.* The washing of water by the word is what Christ is continuing in heaven for us. He acts by His Spirit and His Word, in us and on us. He restores us when we wander, cleanses us from every defilement, and corrects our every error. He is our Advocate (1 John 2.1).

The Decoration

As the priests looked at the Sea they would see the 'brim' with 'flowers of lilies'. The daily application of the Word of God will reveal the fragrance and beauty of holiness in us. The 'knops' further suggest the character of fruitfulness which will flow from our work and walk. But, what of the oxen? The oxen speak of patient endurance in service. *Psalm 144.14: That our oxen may be strong to labour.* Whatever side the priest approached the Sea, he was faced by the symbol of patient labour. The priest could never exhaust the patience devoted to the work of cleansing him from all his defilements. Praise God we can never weary Him by our constant coming to the Word for cleansing. His patience and strength is endless. As the Sea speaks of the Word of God, its decoration will also remind us of the Lord Jesus as revealed in the Word (2 Corinthians 3.18). For example, it is full of His fragrance and beauty (lilies). His character of fruitfulness is seen (knops), as is His patient endurance in service (oxen). The Lord Jesus is the One who patiently endured the cross (Hebrews 12.2) and opposition of sinners (Hebrews 12.3).

The Lavers (2 Chronicles 4.6, 1 Kings 7.27-39)

On either side of the Temple were five Lavers, ten in all. Each Laver had four brazen wheels and measured approximately 2m square and 1.5m high (1 Kings 7.27). Each laver stood on a base which was engraved with figures of lions, oxen, cherubim and palm trees (1 Kings 7.29, 36).

The purpose of the lavers was to wash the sacrifices offered for the Burnt Offering. Every sacrifice that was brought to the Altar spoke of the Lord Jesus, consequently, they must be absolutely clean to picture His holiness. The inwards and legs of the Burnt Offerings were washed (Leviticus 1.9, 13) speaking of the One whose inward thoughts, feelings, purposes and desires were morally pure and well as One whose walk and ways were sinless.

The lions, oxen, cherubim and palm trees would therefore picture the beautiful life of complete devotion (Burnt Offering) that the Lord Jesus lived before God:

- **Lion.** The Lord Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5.5) which speaks of His almighty majesty and power (Proverbs 30.30). The lion also speaks of the 'boldness' of the righteous (Proverbs 28.1). This word expresses the idea of security which results from having someone in whom to place confidence. The Lord Jesus is One who placed His full confidence in God (Psalm 22, 1 Peter 2.23).
- **Ox.** As mentioned above, the ox speaks of patient submission and endurance in service (1 Timothy 5.18).
- **Cherubim.** These angelic beings declare and demonstrate the righteousness of God (Genesis 3.24) as Christ has also done (Romans 3.25).
- **Palm.** The tree stands upright as a symbol of prosperity (Psalm 92.12) and righteousness (Song of Solomon 7.7, Jeremiah 10.5). It was a tree which could flourish and be fruitful even in the adverse and hostile conditions of the desert.