

EXODUS 27 THE PLACE OF REFUGE

We are learning about God's ways, about who He is and what He does. The Tabernacle was a great teaching tool to learn how to approach and worship God. He is a holy God who was making Himself approachable to the people. He always wants His people to follow His instructions on how to worship Him correctly. We are sinners in need of a mediator and a sacrifice to get us in the right relationship with God. The Tabernacle teaches us that we need something done with our sins, for the first thing we see as we enter in and peer into the courtyard is the altar. The altar is the place to bring the innocent sacrifice for sins. This place meant there had to be death. Even though it is a place of death and judgment, it is a place to flee to. It is a place of refuge and safety for God's people because this is the only place sins could be dealt with.

Today, the altar is Christ and it is He who we flee to. We flee to the cross, for that is where we have our sins dealt with and are made right with God. That is where we find our peace and true safety. No matter what turmoil we may have in our lives, this altar is the answer to all of our problems as we bring ourselves there always.

The altar was of course a very key piece of furniture of the Tabernacle since it was a major component of getting the sin taken care of. We will also observe the courtyard and the light in the Tent of Meeting. This whole Tabernacle is a picture of Christ, and as we look at the details, we learn better of the ways of God and what Christ did and what our need is.

1. REFUGE REQUIRES SACRIFICE VV 1-8 **THE BRONZE ALTAR**

A. ALTAR OF BURNT OFFERING

This first article that was seen by the one who was bringing the sacrifice was the altar known as the altar of bronze, the altar of burnt offering, or the outer altar.

Leviticus 4:7,10,18, Exodus 29:42-43(every morning)

Exodus 29:15-18 This is an example of the kinds of offerings for the altar.

I don't think we have ever seen an altar, at least biblically, but maybe the best way to think of it in our time would be a giant barbeque grill of 7.5 ft x 4.5 ft.. That would be one mean, grillin machine. George Foreman doesn't have one this big. This barbeque was to be used to worship God. It is an altar on which sacrifices are burned in homage to God. The sacrificial animal would be roasted to the Lord. Its smoke was a soothing aroma to the Lord. I'm sure you like the smell of a barbeque.

There is nothing like the smell of steaks on the grill. To the Lord it's a soothing aroma, not because of dinner, but what it means.

B. BRONZE

This altar was made of wood but overlaid with bronze.
The further one got away from the inner sanctuary, the less valuable were the metals.
Bronze compared to silver and gold would be less, but is very practical because of the use of fire. The closer you are to the symbolic presence of God, the more expensive the metals and materials.

Bronze is often identified with Judgment—Deut 28:23, Rev 1:15

C. WORSHIPPER'S IDENTIFICATION WITH SACRIFICE

priests) lay their hands on its head. This is to symbolize the transfer of the priests' sin (= their revolt against God) to the animal. Then, once the sin has been symbolically transferred to the animal, the animal is killed—killed *in place of* the priests.

Priests are men just like us; therefore they are guilty in God's court. They sin just like you and me. As the writer of the Hebrews says, "Because of this the priest is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins" (Hebrews 5:3a ESV).

The reason why priests are obligated to offer sacrifices for their sins—that is, the reason why an innocent animal has to die in place of a sinful priest is that God's penalty for sin is death. And since God is just, he must always and consistently exact the penalty that sin deserves

Through the altar of burnt offering, God depicts vividly the strictness of his judgment. Sin deserves death. And if sinful human beings are going to approach the sinless and perfectly just God, then the punishment must be meted out upon an approved substitute

Leviticus 1:1-9 The transfer of sin

D. BLOODSHED AND DEATH

Unlike the golden altar of incense in the Holy Place, the brazen altar was a place of bloodshed and death.

Hebrews 9:22

Through the altar of burnt offering, God depicts vividly the strictness of his judgment. Sin deserves death. And if sinful human beings are going to approach the sinless and perfectly just God, then the punishment must be meted out upon an approved substitute

The way into the presence of God began at the bronze altar where innocent victims died for guilty sinners. According to His instructions we are to worship Him. We can only approach Him on His terms and not ours.

The Lord says in 25:8 that this place—the tabernacle—is the place where he wants to dwell among his people, but in order for his people to dwell in his presence, they must have access—and that access is only granted for those whose sin has been paid for through a substitute sacrifice. If you were to have tried to approach God apart from this prescription—even if you were to have been given a special job being one of his priests—God would have taken you out.

The only safe haven for anybody is when they came to the altar and had their sins atoned for by the substitute animal. Without the altar you were on your own. The altar was home, a place of safety. It gave you comfort. You didn't get the punishment you deserved. This is the place you were forgiven because of what the sacrificial animal did.

E. THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR

There were horns on this altar and there could be a couple of reasons that we know what they were for, besides smearing blood upon them.

1. Binding the beast to the altar would be one use for them.

Psalm 118:27 This is binding the sacrifice with cords around the horns of the altar.

2. **Fleeing for mercy----The place of safety and refuge**

Turn with me back to **Exodus 21:12-14**.

¹² "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. ¹³ "But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. ¹⁴ "If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die.

In verse 13, the Lord gives instructions for how to handle people who commit involuntary manslaughter. It says that God **will appoint a place to which the man may flee**. The place to which he's referring is a city of refuge. You can read about cities of refuge in Numbers 35. Numbers 35:12 nicely sums up the reason for such cities: "The cities shall be to you as a refuge from the avenger, so that the manslayer will not die until he stands before the congregation for trial."

So if you've been out hunting in the woods with your buddy and accidentally shoot him in the face, well, in the ANE you would have had a family member hunt you down until you were dead. So what the Lord provides here is a place of refuge, a place of safety where you can await a proper trial.

Involuntary manslaughter, the perpetrator finds safety. Premeditated homicide, the perpetrator finds none. And finding no refuge is described as being taken from the Lord's altar. Now then, why is that? Well, the answer has to do with the altar's horns

Exodus 21:12-14, 1 Kings 1:49-53

Verses 50-51 are crucial for understanding the altar of **Exodus 27**. Make special note of them as I read them again: **And Adonijah was afraid of Solomon, and he arose, went and took hold of the horns of the altar. Now it was told Solomon, saying, "Behold, Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon, for behold, he has taken hold of the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.'"**

Do you see that? Adonijah grabbed **hold of the horns of the altar** for safety, for protection from the wrath of Solomon, which he received until he could be brought before his brother. And in this case, seeing his brother prostrate before him, Solomon showed mercy and Adonijah was spared.⁵

The *point* is that the horns of the altar represent the safety, the refuge that God provides. God provides refuge from his own wrath through the sacrifices offered on the horned altar. So when men take hold of the horns of the altar they see it as a place of refuge for them, a place for protection from the wrath of men. The logic is that if the altar can protect me from the God's retribution, surely it can protect me from man's.

So then, what is the significance of the altar of burnt offering? Very simply, it is the place where sacrifices for sin are made so that God's people can be protected from his retribution and safely enter his presence. This was all symbolic. We need something more than symbols.

F. CALVARY, THE SUPREME ALTAR

Christ died on the cross for the sins of His people all over the world.

Matthew 26:26-28, Jn 1:29, 3:14-16, Rom 5:8, 1 Pet 2:24

G. JESUS CHRIST IS THE ALTAR

We need a better sacrifice on a better altar to really take our sins away.

By the way, that's one reason that Protestant churches don't have physical altars in the sanctuary. We have a communion table from which we take the Lord's Supper, but not an altar. Why? Not because we don't have an altar, but because we do have an altar, and that altar is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is our sacrifice and our altar.

His blood satisfies the wrath of the Father and the blood makes the purchase price.

We don't take hold of the horns but we take hold of Christ as he keeps us safe from the wrath of God and delivers us safely to our heavenly dwelling. He brings us into the presence of God.

Heb 9:25-28, 13:10, Luke 24:39, John 20:20

Christ is our safety, our refuge, even in danger.

H. THE HOLY PRIESTHOOD, US

Because of the Great High Priest, Jesus, we are priests who minister Daily offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

1 Peter 2:5, Rom 12:1-2, Phil 4:18, Heb 13:15-16, Ps 51:17

I. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BURNT OFFERING

It is the place where sacrifices for sin are made so that God's people can be protected from His retribution and safely enter His presence.

2. REFUGE HAD DIVIDING WALLS VV 9-19

THE COURTYARD

A second thing, look at verses 9 through 19. All temples and sanctuaries in the ancient world would have had a space demarcating the sacred from the profane, setting off the sacred space from profane space. And this itself reveals one of the key ideas of holiness in the Old Testament. The idea of separation, to be holy, was to be separate, to separate from the world. And the later temples in Israel's history also had courtyards. Solomon's temple had courtyards. Herod's temple had courtyards. In fact, we know that Herod's temple had four courtyards. There was a courtyard for the priests. There was a courtyard for Jewish males. There was a courtyard for Jewish females. And then there was a courtyard called the courtyard of the Gentiles. And these courts were separated by dividing walls. And Josephus tells that there was even a signed warning that if Gentiles entered into any of the other courts they would face death.

Classes of people separated There were the priests, then the men, then women, then Gentiles.
Christ broke the wall Eph 2:14

It's a beautiful picture of the way that Jesus has brought reconciliation. And so the courtyard demarcated sacred space to the worshipers. But it also separated classes of people, and Jesus Christ, in His redemptive work, brought together those who had been separated as they believed in Him.

3. THE PERPETUAL BURNING LAMP VV 20-21

The people never got to see in the holy place. In the Meeting Place was the lampstand where
There was light in the tent all the time, otherwise it would have been dark with the veils
in place and shutting off the outside.

The symbolism of this continually refueled lamp seems to point to the presence of the unseen God.

Symbolism of the presence of God Rev 22:5 We will experience the very presence
of God. At that time we will not need a lamp. We will be right in the very presence
of the glorious God.

The Tabernacle seems so distant to us, but there are valuable lessons here for us today, for it giving us great illustrations of the reality of Christ and what he has done. These are deep spiritual blessings indeed.

True safety, the safety that's found in Jesus Christ, is safety that transcends physical death—whether we're martyred for the faith or die putting up Christmas lights—it doesn't matter when we know that we have taken hold of the horns of the altar who is Jesus Christ, when we know that we have been spared the torment of body and soul in hell and guaranteed resurrection life in the new world.

And just as there is true safety, there is also true danger.

If true safety is found in the refuge of Christ alone, then true danger is found in the places of refuge we run to *instead* of Christ.

What or who are we hoping in for our eternity? Are you holding on to your own goodness, your own performance of God's laws to get you there? Are you holding on to your religion? Are you holding on to the hope that your good deeds will outweigh your evil deeds at the judgment? Then the horns you're holding will crumble in your hands

What are you holding on to right now for your refuge? Is it Christ or something else?

If it's something else, flee to the arms of Christ and hold on to those horns. That is the only safe place in the universe.