

Bible Study # 46 Exodus 27.1–8 03–31–2021

Provision had already been made for temporary altars of earth or undressed stone (20:22–26), but additional instructions were needed to make provision for the altar that would be placed in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. It had to be sufficiently durable for the burning of sacrificial animals, but light enough to be transported.

It was a very significant part of the Tent of Meeting as the sacrifices offered on it pointed forward to Christ's sacrifice. He was the Passover lamb of God (John 1:19; 1 Cor. 5:7) who came to offer Himself once and for all 'to bear the sins of many' (Heb. 9:26–28).

1–3 The altar was made of acacia wood, it was a square of five cubits (2.20 m), and it was three cubits high (1.30 m). While the word 'horn' often meant the horns of animals, it assumed the specialized meaning of a projection on the altar's four corners. A number of examples uncovered by archaeological investigations (such as those at Arad and Beersheba) have confirmed the general structure of altars complete with horns.

The horns may have been designed to help in attaching the sacrificial animal, and though grasped by those seeking asylum (cf., for two contrasting cases, the respective results for Adonijah [1 Kings 1:50–53] and Joab [1 Kings 2:28–34]), they do not appear to have had greater significance than any other part of the altar.

To protect the wood, bronze was used as an overlay. Various utensils were necessary for the sacrificial rituals, and these were also to be made of bronze.

Vs.4–7 relate to some parts of the altar that are difficult to describe with any certainty. The first one is a Hebrew word that only occurs six times in the Old Testament, all of which are in the Exodus accounts of the Tent of Meeting (27:4; 35:16; 38:4, 5, 30; 39:39). It appears to mean something that is intertwined, and hence 'a grating'.

The next one is a Hebrew word which normally means 'nets' for catching fish or birds. Here it is used for 'network' that had four bronze rings in its corners, into which were inserted poles for transportation (vv. 6–7). This grating and network were attached to the altar under the top ledge so that the network extended half way down (v. 5).

It is made plain that the altar was not of solid construction. Rather it was 'hollow', a word that only occurs four times in the OT (Exod. 27:8; 38:7; Job 11:12; Jer. 52:21), but its meaning is confirmed by the LXX's use of the Greek word translated as 'body cavity', 'belly'.

Even though the wood of the altar had a bronze overlay, the intense heat must have been a problem, and thus it is possible that the hollow interior was filled with earth to prevent any damage to the structure of the altar. Another section ends at verse 8 with the reminder that in regard to the altar, no deviation from the pattern shown to Moses on the mount was permissible.

No mention is made here of the altar of incense that was positioned in the Holy Place (see 30:1–10).

We will continue our study tomorrow with Exodus 27.9–21.