

The Bronze Altar  
Exodus 27:1-8; Exodus 38:1-8

The Tabernacle is perhaps the most perfect, inanimate type of Christ found in all of Scripture. It reveals the nature, character and work of God in the world.

Altars are a fundamental part of Christian worship.

Noah built altars. Gen 8:20  
Abraham built altars. Gen 12:7  
Isaac built altars. Gen 26:25  
Jacob built altars. Gen 35:7  
Moses built altars. Exo 17:15  
Joshua built altars. Jos 8:30  
David built altars. 1 Chr 21:26  
Elijah repaired altars. 1 Kgs 18:30  
Our hearts are altars. Ro 12:1

This particular altar

- An acacia wood box
- Overlaid with bronze
- 4' 6" high
- 7' 6" square
- Horns on each corner

The altar in the Tabernacle speaks to at least four biblical truths about redemption and reconciliation.

**First: Sacrifice**

In all but four of the OT occurrences of the word 'altar' the Hebrew word is *mizbeah* = place of sacrifice.

The most frequent NT word for altar is *thysiasterin* which is equal to *mizbeah*.

The other word for altar, *bomos* is used only once in

Acts 17:23 - *For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.*

That same word in Hebrew as *bomos* means "high place"

Sacrifice is an OT and NT theme.

Hebrews 9:22 - *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*  
The life of the flesh is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11)

The cost of forgiveness – the shedding of blood – demonstrates the cost of sin; life.

The brazen altar showed the Israelites that the first step for sinful people to approach a holy God is to be cleansed by the blood of an innocent creature.

Every bull, sheep and bird illustrated the horror and cost of sin. But these sacrifices had to be repeated and the Day of Atonement only put off the cost of sin for another year. All Israel longed for a Redeemer

Genesis 3:15 - I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

Genesis 4:1 - *Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD."*

Genesis 30:1-2 - *When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!"<sup>1</sup> Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"*

Luke 1:30-33 - *And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."<sup>1</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.<sup>2</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,<sup>3</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

Acts 8:26-34 - *<sup>26</sup>Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south<sup>1</sup> to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place.<sup>27</sup> And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship<sup>28</sup> and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.<sup>29</sup> And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."<sup>30</sup> So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"<sup>31</sup> And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.<sup>32</sup> Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth."<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.<sup>34</sup> And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"*

Mark 8:29-32 - *And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ."<sup>30</sup> And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him.<sup>31</sup> And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again.<sup>32</sup> And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.*

**Hebrews 10:1-30 - T**

But why is a sacrifice needed?

### **Second: Satisfaction**

The first thing an Israelite saw after entering the outer courtyard was the bronze altar that had a continual fire burning on it.

Leviticus 6:9-13 - *Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the burnt offering. The burnt offering shall be on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of*

*the altar shall be kept burning on it. 10 And the priest shall put on his linen garment and put his linen undergarment on his body, and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar and put them beside the altar. 11 Then he shall take off his garments and put on other garments and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place. 12 The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. 13 Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out.*

Where did this fire come from?

*Exodus 9:23-24 - And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting, and when they came out they blessed the people, and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. 24 And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the pieces of fat on the altar, and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.*

This is reminiscent of the fire at Mount Carmel

*1 Kings 18:38-29 - Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 29 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.*

The fire on the altar reflects God's nature

*Hebrews 12:28 - let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.*

God is loving. He is equally holy. His love does not displace his judgement. In fact, he judges because he loves.

Every bull, goat, sheep or bird that was sacrificed reminded Israel that God was holy and judges sin. It reminded Israel that some sort of satisfaction needed to be made for their sin. Someone must pay the price for sin. There is no exception.

### **Third: Confession**

*1 Samuel 7:9 - So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. And Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him.*

*Leviticus 16:21:24 - And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. 24 The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.*

Propitiation – Covering of sins – the slaughtered goat

Expiation – Removing sins – the live goat

Propitiation is something done to a person: Christ propitiated God in the sense that he turned God's wrath away from guilty sinners by enduring that wrath himself in the isolation of Calvary. Expiation is what is done to crimes or sins or evil deeds: Jesus cancelled them by his death.

*Colossians 2:13-14 - And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the*

record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

#### **Fourth: Substitution**

The altar had four corners and four horns on each corner.

Psalm 118:27 - *Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!*

Binding the sacrifices to the altar insured

- a) The sacrifice was completely consumed
- b) Neither the priest or the worshipper

John 1:29 – Behold, the Lamb of God, who take away the sin of the world.

**Hebrews 9:11-14** – **T** - *But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.*

Paul alludes to the binding of the sacrifice in

Romans 12:1-2 - *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

#### **Fifth: Some Other Thoughts**

The horns on the altar were symbolic of God's presence and power

2 Samuel 22:3 - *... my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence.*

They were also symbolic of God's protection

**1 Kings 1:50-53** – **T** - *And Adonijah feared Solomon. So he arose and went and took hold of the horns of the altar. Then it was told Solomon, "Behold, Adonijah fears King Solomon, for behold, he has laid hold of the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon swear to me first that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.'" And Solomon said, "If he will show himself a worthy man, not one of his hairs shall fall to the earth, but if wickedness is found in him, he shall die." So King Solomon sent, and they brought him down from the altar. And he came and paid homage to King Solomon, and Solomon said to him, "Go to your house."*

The same judgement that could condemn us, also saves us. The cross both condemns and saves. It condemns those who don't trust Jesus and reject his sacrifice, because there is no other way to God, while it saves those who do.

