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Build an Altar of Acacia Wood Overlaid with Bronze 27:1-8 and 38:1-7

Build an altar of acacia wood overlaid with bronze DIG: How do we know this was an altar for burnt offerings (see Leviticus 4:7, 10 and 18)? What distinguished this altar from Sanctuary (see 26:1-37)?

REFLECT: Why such emphasis on the physical setting and details? What does this say about worship, then and now? How do we take care of the sin issue in our lives today (see First John 1:8-10)?

There were seven pieces of furniture in the Tabernacle, and every one of them foreshadowed Jesus Christ. When the Israelite passed through the gate into the courtyard of the Tabernacle with his offering, he stood before an altar made of wood covered over with bronze.⁵²⁴

Man was standing on the outside. How was he going to approach **ADONAI**? The first thing he needed was a substitute to die for him. Man might avoid meeting **God**, but if he wanted to meet **God** and not die, he must have a substitute. Someone needed to die on **the bronze altar** for him.⁵²⁵ We read of no **altar** in the garden of Eden. Man in his innocence, created in the image of **YHVH**, needed none. He had no sin to pay for. But it was man's sin that made an **altar** necessary, and it was **God's** grace that provided one.⁵²⁶



The location of **the bronze altar** was at the center of the eastern half of the courtyard (**to see link click Ex - The Courtyard and Gate of the Tabernacle**). **God** commanded: **Build an altar of acacia wood overlaid with bronze, three cubits, or four feet, six inches high; it is to be square, five cubits, or seven feet, six inches long and the width was the same (27:1; 38:1).** Its dimensions were **five cubits square**, matching those of an **altar** of earth from the Solomonic period excavated at Arad in southern Isra'el in 1967-68 (also see **20:24-25**).⁵²⁷

Make a horn at each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar are of one piece, and overlay the altar with bronze (27:2; 38:2). The horns were used to bind sacrifices upon **the altar** for burning (**Psalms 118:27**). When a sin offering was made the priest would dip his finger in **the blood** of the animals and touch those **four horns** (**Exodus 29:12; Leviticus 8:15, 9:9, 16:18**). Inasmuch as an animal having **horns** uses them for attacking other animals, **horns** came to be symbolic of strength or power (**First Samuel 2:1 and 10; Psalm 75:10**). A horned **altar** was found in Tel Dan in 1974.⁵²⁸

Taking hold of **the horns of the altar** provided refuge for the guilty Israelite, like **Christ** provides safety for the sinner fleeing from the righteous judgment of **God**. In this regard, two men who lived in the days of David and Solomon stand out in stark contrast. Their names were Adonijah and Joab. Both fled for safety to **the horns of the altar**. Adonijah was spared for a time, though later he was executed for rebellion; whereas, Joab was slain right at **the horns of the altar** (**First Kings 1:50-51; 2:28-34**). What was the difference? It seems as though Adonijah's finding refuge and safety during David's lifetime speaks to us of mercy in this age of grace; while Joab's execution during the reign of Solomon foreshadows

swift and certain judgment when **Christ, the Greater than Solomon (Luke 11:31)**, returns again. **Now is the day of salvation (Second Corinthians 6:2)**. It will be too late for the **Christ-rejecting** world to look for mercy when they see the righteous **Jesus** coming back in glory to reign as **the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5)**. If they reject **His** mercy now, they will meet **Him** as the holy **Judge** of all the earth later (**First Peter 4:5**).⁵²⁹

*It was not a pleasant thing to see an innocent animal slaughtered and burned, but then sin is an ugly thing and the sacrifice here, as well as **Messiah's** sacrifice on the cross, should be a vivid reminder to everyone of the hideous nature of sin and its price.*⁵³⁰

Continuing with the description of **the bronze altar**, **ADONAI** said: **Make a grating for it, a bronze network, and make a bronze ring at each of the four corners of the network (27:4; 38:4)**. It was upon this **grating** that the sacrifices would be burned. **Put it under the ledge so that it is halfway up the altar (27:5; 38:5)**. **Make the altar hollow, out of boards. It is to be just as you were shown on the mountain (27:8)**. The bottom half of **the altar** was **hollow**, and it may later have been filled with small stones, with the fire being built of earth and stones.⁵³¹

Bronze would hold the fire, because it can withstand high temperatures. It pictures fire and judgment. **Make all its utensils of bronze - its pots to remove the fatty ashes** from the sacrifice, **its shovels and firepans, its bowls** that held **the blood** from the sacrifice that was sprinkled on the altar, **and its meat forks** to skewer and turn the sacrifice (**27:3; 38:3**). After **God** had accepted the offering by being burned upon **the altar**, the priest, in white linen, took the **ashes** from underneath the grate to a place outside of the camp. The ashes were prized, because they were used in sprinkling the unclean, as in the case of lepers.

Make poles of acacia wood for the altar and overlay them with bronze (27:6; 38:6). **The poles are to be inserted into the rings so they will be on two sides of the altar when it is carried (27:7; 38:7)**. **The altar** was to be carried by **poles**, in a similar fashion to **the Ark of the Covenant (25:13-15)**. It was also a holy object. However, there were two differences. First, **the poles of the altar** were to be overlaid with **bronze**, not with gold like the ark. Secondly, **the poles were to be inserted into the rings of the altar** only when it was carried, whereas in the case of **the Ark, the poles** rested permanently in **the rings**.⁵³²

The significance of **the bronze altar** is that access to **ADONAI** is always by means of **blood**. This is reiterated in both the TaNaKh and the B'rit Chadashah. There are three key

passages on this. First, **for the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life (Leviticus 17:11)**. Secondly, **in fact, the Torah requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22)**. Thirdly, in **Hebrews 9:1 through 10:18** it is emphasized that although the priests of the Levitical system had to repeat the bloody sacrifices day in and day out, **Jesus** would be the final, once for all time, **blood** sacrifice.

Some have said that believers have no **bronze altar** today. Yet, the author of the book of **Hebrews** makes it very clear that **the bronze altar of the Tabernacle** foreshadowed the cross of **Jesus Christ**, and that the sacrifices offered on **the altar** pictured **His** broken body and shed **blood**.

The writer to the **Hebrews** wrote to the Messianic community who had left the Temple worship, following the death and resurrection of **the Messiah**. The anonymous author to the Jewish exiles said: **We have an altar from which those who minister at the Tabernacle have no right to eat (Hebrews 13:10)**. The Temple was still standing at that time. But the nation, as a whole, still rejected **Jesus** as **the Messiah**. However, the righteous of the TaNaKh, having withdrawn from the Temple worship because they realized that **Christ** had come to fulfill the Torah, were being bitterly persecuted by the unbelieving Jews for their stand. **The Psalmist**, however, had the remedy. **He** said: **Taste and see that ADONAI is good (Psalm 34:8; First Peter 2:3)**. But those who had rejected **Christ** had **no** part in the worship at the foot of **His** cross.

On the Day of Atonement, **the high priest** carried **the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies were burned outside the camp** of Isra'el. **And so Jesus, also, suffered outside the city gate on the cross to make the people holy through His own blood. Let us, then, go to Him outside the camp** of those in the world, no longer a part of its system, its standards or its practices (**Hebrews 13:11-12**).

This is a wonderful lesson that we have before us today. The cross of **Jesus Christ** is our **bronze altar**; therefore, that **altar** was but a faint **shadow** of **Christ**. **The Holy Spirit** does not belittle **the Torah** but gives it its rightful place in the unfolding of **God's** work in history when **He** says: **The Torah has in it a shadow of good things to come (Hebrews 10:1 CJB)**, when **Jesus** returns a second time.⁵³³