

Study #2 The Brazen Altar & The Laver

Introduction

As you enter the outer court of the Tabernacle through the gate on the eastern side, the first thing one encounters is the brazen altar (Fig 2.1) and then as you pass by you encounter the brazen laver (Fig 2.2) prior to reaching the curtain that guards the holy place. The arrangement of these items in the tabernacle is shown in Fig 2.3.

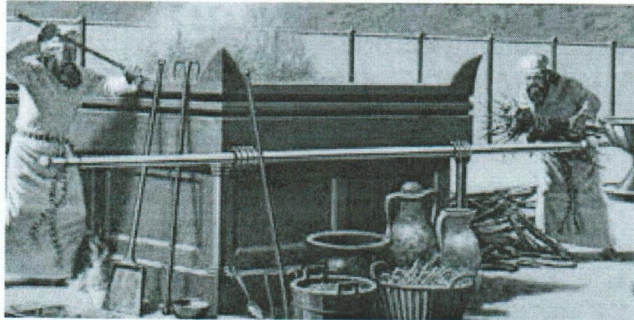
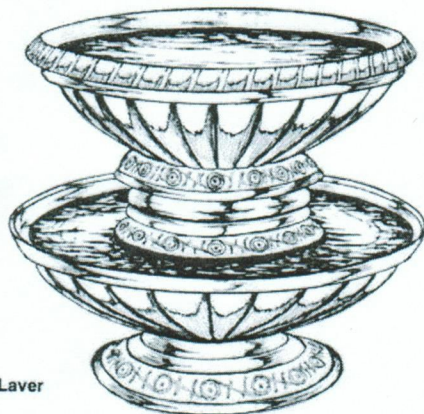


Fig 2.1 The brazen altar



The Brazen Laver

Fig 2.2 The brazen laver

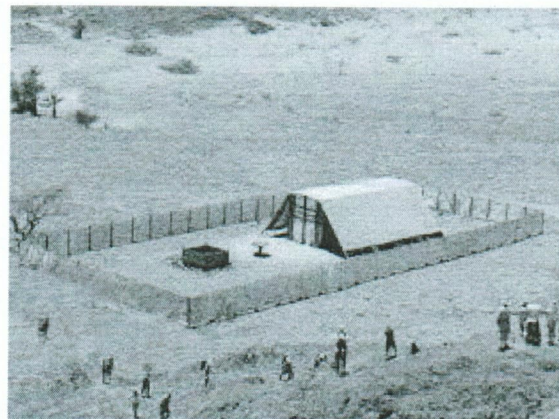


Fig 2.3 The Tabernacle arrangement

The Brazen Altar

Its Purpose

The construction of the altar is described in Exodus 27.1-2. It is essentially a box made of acacia wood and covered in bronze. Bear in mind that bronze and brass are often used

interchangeably in the Old Testament. It is interesting to note that brass is often associated with the judgement of God in the scriptures, so it is no surprise that it is associated with the place of sacrifice.

The altar, the place of sacrifice, is the first thing a sinner encounters when entering the Tabernacle. In order to meet with and worship a holy God, sinful man needs to come by the way of sacrifice and that with a substitution for his sin.

The term altar has the meaning of "to be lifted up" and in that sense serves as a Christology or a type of Christ (John 12.32). As a sacrifice had to be lifted up (the altar was approximately 1.2 metres or 4 feet high) to be placed on the brazen altar to be sacrificed, so also Christ had to be lifted up on that cruel Roman cross.

The altar was a place of substitutionary death, where the blood of a lamb was poured out and its body destroyed by fire – a dramatic picture of judgement. From the time Adam sinned, atonement has been by the shedding of blood and only by the shedding of blood (Lev 17.11). As the brazen altar bars the way to God in the holy place, so too the cross bars the way to salvation and fellowship with a holy God. Those who choose to by-pass or avoid the cross of Christ will find no genuine peace with God and will remain in their condemnation

Sacrifices were offered daily in the Tabernacle. The blood that was shed and the bodies that were sacrificed in fire had the effect of covering the sin of the one who brought it, but forgiveness was not executed upon that individual until the Lamb of God, Yeshua the Messiah, cried out on the cross "tetelestai" – the single Greek word meaning it is finished. The sacrifice of the Lamb of God is a once and forever event (Heb 9.25-28). At that moment, every soul who had by faith offered a lamb as a substitutionary sacrifice was afforded full and final forgiveness that will last for all of eternity.

Its Design & Construction

Exod 25.40 & Heb 8.5 tell us that the altar had to be made to an exacting pattern delivered to Moses by God on Mt Sinai. In Exod 27.1-2 we are told it had to be made of shittim (acacia) wood and overlaid by brass (probably bronze). Bronze is an ancient building material which is actually an alloy of copper and tin. Brass speaks of judgement, and Jesus Christ as the Son of Man was judged in the flesh for the sin of all mankind (cf Phil 2.6-8).

The acacia tree grew under unrelenting severe and adverse conditions of the desert. As such, it is a picture of the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ for "he was a root out of dry ground" (Isa 53.2). The great miracle related to the Tabernacle altar is that it did not completely deteriorate from the constant heat from the fire which burned day and night – a picture of how Jesus, though in constant contact with the sin of this world, did not succumb to its temptations. Christ was also a constant living miracle.

Its Four Horns

On the brazen altar were four horns, one on each corner as specified in Exod 27.2). The sacrifice was bound to these horns. Horns in the scripture are representative of power as one can easily deduce from studying the prophecies of Daniel and John in revelation. The horns, representing power as they do, are widely regarded to represent the power of the gospel (cf Rom 1.16 & I Cor 1.18)

The four horns pointed in every direction, sending the message to the Israelites that no one is excluded. In like fashion, the gospel is for everyone and indeed "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

The horns of the altar also provided a place that a person could flee to if he was being persecuted. When Adonijah feared that Solomon might kill him, he "arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar" (I Kings 1.50).

Just as the altar was a place for people to flee to in order to obtain mercy, so the cross of Christ is the place of refuge to flee from the clutches of sin and Satan (Heb 2.14-15).

Its Fire

The fire on the brazen altar was from God and started by God (Lev9.24). The origin of this fire was totally unrelated to man. Fire kindled by man on the altar is referred to as "strange fire" in the scriptures and the penalty for kindling such a fire was immediate death. This is precisely what happened to the sons of Aaron (Nadab & Abihu). When they kindled a strange fire on the altar, a fire went out from God and consumed them (Lev 10.1-3).

This teaches us a serious lesson concerning salvation. God will not permit any mixture of human works in His plan of salvation – it is all of grace (Eph 2.8-9).

Its Sacrifice

In ancient Israel, the consumption of the sacrifice by fire showed the people that the sacrifice had been accepted by God. When Elijah challenged the prophets of Ba'al the sacrifice he prepared was consumed by fire from Heaven (I Kings 18.38). The priests work in the Tabernacle sacrificing lambs was never done and he never sat down in the Tabernacle. By contrast, following Christ's sacrifice, He sat down at the right hand of the Father, signifying the forever completion of the work of atonement (Heb 10.11-12).

Christ is the end of the struggle for all those who believe (Heb 4.9-10).

The Brazen Laver

Its Construction

The brazen laver sits between the brazen altar and the curtain between the outer court and the Holy Place. The priests had to stop at it to wash their hands and their feet before

entering the Holy Place. God gave instructions to Moses on exactly how to construct the laver (Exod 30.18-21). In Exod 38.8, Moses reveals where he obtained the brass for the construction of the laver – he used the looking glasses of the women. In those days looking glasses were not mirrors as they are today, but rather, highly polished brass.

Its Place in the Tabernacle

The order of location of the brazen altar and the brazen laver in the Tabernacle in relation to the gate where a sinner entered presents a beautiful picture of the progress in salvation. The brazen altar represents the cross of Christ, where faith is expressed in the substitutionary death of Christ. This is the starting place of salvation. Our justification is complete when we place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second aspect of salvation has to do with separation, otherwise known as sanctification and the laver speaks so eloquently of this. This aspect has to do with the believers behaviour and the need to have a cleansed life. This is so perfectly typified by the laver, water being representative of the Word. Christ said "Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken to you" (John 15.3).

The third aspect of salvation relates to the time when we will be taken from this life to be with the Lord. This is spoken of as our glorification when we will receive changed bodies to enter into His presence (cf I Cor 15.51-53) This is typified by the priest passing through the curtain into the Holy Place and is the subject of another study.

Its Purpose

The laver was made with an upper bowl and a lower bowl, the upper for washing the hands and the lower for the feet. The priests were to wash their hands and feet at the laver before proceeding into the Holy Place, the place of fellowship with God (cf Exod 3.21). This provides a beautiful parallel to the Christian life. Our hands speak of our service and our feet speak of our walk. The laver, therefore, emphasizes our need to have clean hands as we serve the Lord Jesus Christ and clean feet as we walk with Him.

No priest could enter the Holy Place without first washing his hands and feet. Failure to do so would make him ceremonially unclean. The penalty for entering the Holy Place, to fellowship with God, was death (cf Exod 30.20-21). John (Rev 1.6) and Peter (I Pet 2.9) both tell us that the testament priests are a typology of New Testament believers we must deal with sin in our daily walk before we can expect to come into God's presence to behold His beauty, to worship Him and to enjoy fellowship with Him. In Paul's discussion of the Lord's Supper (communion) in I Cor 11.23-31, he clearly states that the result of coming to partake of the communion meal in an unworthy manner, that is, with unconfessed sin in your life, is that some were sick and others had died. He then goes on to say that if we should judge ourselves we should not be judged for failure to judge your own sin will most certainly bring chastening by the Lord.

Its Water

The water in the laver was symbolic of the Word of God. The scriptures often speak of the cleansing that comes through the application of the Word (John 15.3, Eph 5.26, et al). The Psalmist asked, "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?" and then proceeds immediately to offer the answer – "by taking heed thereto according to thy word." The importance of repentance (confessing sin and turning away from it) is expressed in many places in the scripture and needs to be practiced daily by Christians in order to maintain fellowship with God (cf I John 1.7-9, Prov 28.13, et al), just as the priests had to wash at the laver every time they sought to enter the Holy Place.

Summary & Application

The brazen altar with its brass covering and fire represents substitutionary sacrifice, the place where salvation is provided. Beyond that, the brazen laver represents sanctification, our being set apart for service to God and fellowship with Him.