

BFF307 The Bronze Altar – There, I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory.

Scott Moore: Welcome to the "Building Faith Families Podcast" with Steve Demme. I'm your host, Scott Moore. Thanks for joining us today. Good morning, Steve. How are you today?

Steve: I am OK. It's very cold. I just took the pups out for their morning walk. As I walk down the street, I worship God according to the perspective of Psalm 100. I come into His presence with singing, enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. As I was seeking God this morning, I was cognizant of how much of the life of the children of Israel revolved around the altar.

Think about the language in Psalm 100, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving, enter His courts with praise." Gates and courts are part of the courtyard of the mobile tabernacle. Later when they came into the Promised land, the temple became the center of their worship.

In the tabernacle the altar was significant, especially when you are walking through the gate, which we've studied. As you walk in, the first thing you're going to see is this big bronze altar. The message is that the only way into the Holy of Holies is through sacrifice and offering. As I'm standing there looking at the altar, I can see the Holy of Holies above and beyond it since the tent of the tabernacle is higher than the altar.

What a visual perspective. There is God in the Holy of Holies, and on the way to God is this bronze altar.

Let's Pray: Father, help us today to have your perspective. Help us to enter into why this altar is so important and why this is a central part of the worship and the life of the children of Israel. Especially since the word altar is used over 300 times in the Bible. We see it all the way from Genesis, and eventually six times in the book of Revelation. Help us to have your eyes today. Help us to have your perspective, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Scott: Amen.

Steve: Exodus 27:1, "You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long, five cubits broad. The altar shall be square. Its height shall be three cubits." If, what we're told from scholars is accurate, a cubit is a foot and a half, which makes this structure seven-and-a-half feet wide and deep, and four-and-a-half feet high.

"And you shall make horns for it on its four corners. Its horn shall be of one piece with it. And you shall overlay it with bronze." This is a wood structure that is one piece, and then covered in bronze.

Then, it goes on to say, "You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels, and basins, and forks, and fire pans. You shall make all its vessels of bronze. You

shall also make for it a grating, a network of bronze, and on the net, you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners.

"And you shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net extends halfway down the altar. And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. And the poles shall be put through the ring, so that the poles are on the two sides of the altar, when it is carried. You shall make it hollow with boards."

It appears that, because it was temporary, this altar had to be carriable. Now, if you'd had 7.5 feet by 7.5 feet by 4.5 feet, all of bronze, you'd had to have some stout fellows that would be able to pick that thing up and carry it, especially carrying it through the wilderness for 40 years. When you have it made of wood, and then overlaid with bronze, it's much lighter.

When I started looking up the word for acacia wood, there are 27 references are in the Pentateuch talking about the tabernacle and only one other reference, in Isaiah. Acacia wood, registers at 2300 PSI on the Janka Scale. It's 55 percent harder than European white oak, 23 percent harder than hickory. It's a hardwood, but it's also a durable wood.

The website on acacia wood says, "It's great for flooring and an excellent material for building furniture, flooring, etc. One of the most common applications for it is furniture. This tends to be popular because of the strength of the wood, because while it's a hardwood, it'll be able to take a lot of weight without bending out of shape. This makes it the perfect option for building furniture."

God is pretty smart. He didn't say, "Make this out of pine, because it's softer and would be easier to work with but He says, "Make it out of acacia wood." It's also flexible after being cut, but as it dries out, it becomes harder. This means that the furniture will be able to retain its shape for years. Isn't that something?

The word for altar is mizbeach, which is from zabach, which means to slaughter for sacrifices. Altar is found 380 times in the Bible, and seven times in Revelation. The first time that the word altar is used in the Bible is in Genesis 8. "Noah built an altar to the Lord." This is after they had opened the portals. The flood was over, and the dove hadn't returned, so now they are coming out.

All of these animals are disembarking from the ark along with Noah and his family. The first thing they do, "Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird. He offered burnt offerings on the altar."

Now, this is one of the things that I learned years ago when I began hearing people like Ken Ham and the folks from the Institute for Creation Research. I learned that there weren't two of every animal but there were a lot more clean animals than unclean animals. There were at least seven clean animals and possibly seven pairs, or 14. I'm not going to go into it, but just read Genesis carefully you'll see this.

"When the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in His heart, I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither, will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.

"While the Earth remains seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease. God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth."

This is a time of re-creation. God had created the world in six days and made all the animals. They'd multiplied and filled the earth. However man was evil, and so God had to send a flood because of their sin, except for these eight people in this ark full of animals. I had a chance to visit a replica of this ark last year. This is a time of re-creation.

The first thing Noah does when he gets off the ark is, he builds an altar, which shows me the centrality of God in his thinking. This altar was more than a place to offer sacrifices. This was a recommitting themselves to God. They wanted God to be first in everything, and their first action was to offer up burnt offerings on the altar.

God smelled the pleasing aroma, it touched His heart. He said in His heart, "This is not going to happen again." Then He re-commissioned them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth."

Then Abraham, in Genesis 12:7, "Lord appeared to Abram and said, to your offspring, I will give this land." If you know about the life of Abraham, Genesis 12, is when he starts receiving these incredible promises from God.

Then it says, "So he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. From there, he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west, Ai on the east, and there he built an altar to the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord."

God had appeared to Abram and the first thing he does is build an altar. Then he moves, and again, he builds an altar, and he called upon the name of the Lord. In Genesis 13, the next chapter, "Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first and there Abram called on the name of Jehovah." This is after he came out of Egypt.

It's as if after a significant event takes place, you build an altar. You come out of the ark, you build an altar. God speaks to you, you build an altar. He brings you safely down to Egypt and back from Egypt, and now you're rich, and the first thing you do you come into the land to that same place again, and you build an altar. These people were familiar with altars. Noah and Abram were devoted to God.

Of course, we know that in Genesis 22, God had Abram build an altar to offer his son as a sacrifice. Then Jacob, when he comes out of Bethel, made an altar to God who appeared unto him when he was fleeing from Esau.

He built an altar. These altars are not new to the children of Israel is what I'm trying to affirm. Altars are also memorials. They remind us that God has appeared and God has spoken and God has provided an offering in place of my son Isaac. God saved Jacob, Jacob built an altar.

When they come into the promised land after they come out of Egypt, there's a battle on the plain between Joshua and Amalek. Moses is up on the mountain with his hands raised. It says, "After the battle, Moses built an altar and called the name of it, the Lord or Jehovah is my banner, Jehovah Nissi."

The children of Israel are familiar with altars. Now we come to Exodus 20, and they're watching the fire come down on the mountain with lightning and thunder, then Moses comes down with the 10 commandments.

In the 20th chapter, "When all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountains smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood afar off and said to Moses, you speak to us, we will listen, but do not let God speak to us lest we die.

"Moses said to the people, do not fear for God has come to test you that the fear of Him may be before you that you may not sin. The people stood up far off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

"Then the Lord said to Moses, thus you shall say to the people of Israel. You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make gods of silver to be with Me, nor shall you make for yourself gods of gold.

"An altar of earth you shall make for Me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings, and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place, where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you. If you make Me an altar of stone, you should not build it of hewn stones, for if you use your tool on it, you profane it." In every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you."

This ties in with what we've just heard. In every place where God did something significant for Abram, an altar was built. In every place where Jacob encountered God, an altar was built. When Noah comes off the ark, an altar was built.

Then, in the 24th chapter of Exodus, "Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules. And the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words that the Lord has spoken, we will do.

"And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and 12 pillars, according to the 12 tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins and half of the blood he threw against the altar."

Not only did Moses have to sanctify Aaron and his sons, but he had to sanctify this altar. The altar is a special place. In Exodus 29, "You shall purify the altar when you make atonement for it and shall anoint it to consecrate it. Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it and the altar shall be most holy. Whoever touches the altar shall become holy."

I don't want to hustle too fast through this but I want to lay a foundation for this altar. This is a significant part of the courtyard and the gate -- this approach to God himself. In Exodus 29:38, "Now this is what you shall offer on the altar. Two lambs a year old, day-by-day regularly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. And with the first lamb, a tenth measure of fine flour mingled with a fourth of a hin of beaten oil and a fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering."

Then it goes on to say in the 42nd verse, "It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you to speak to you there." Wow. 43rd verse, "There, I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory."

45th verse, "I will dwell among the people of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God."

I'm always reminded that He doesn't just bring us out of Egypt just to get us away from the pain and suffering of slavery, He brings us out of our Egypt to bring us in to a place of fellowship with Him.

This is the reason that they came into the land of Israel, not just so that they have their own land, but that God would dwell with them, and meet with them, and speak to them right there. This is the place where He will meet with them and speak with them, and His glory will sanctify this place.

We have to hold on to the big picture. The tabernacle represented God himself. This is where He was meant to live, this is where He was going to dwell. As I mentioned before, this concept of the tabernacle, this concept of the altar, is throughout the scripture, for significant events.

Samuel, talking to Saul, one of the saddest chapters in the Bible, where Saul loses the kingdom. He says, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offering and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to listen that a fan of ramps."

There was Saul, trying to please the people, and trying to please God, and he ends up doing neither. He loses the kingdom in that chapter, and God then sets up David shortly thereafter. As much as God loves the burnt offerings, ultimately, it's our relationship with God is based on obeying God, not offering sacrifices.

Psalm 51, "David after he sinned in the matter of Bathsheba, prays this incredible Psalm, where he says, you will not delight in sacrifice or I would give it. You will not be pleased with the burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, oh God, you will not despise."

The last passage I'm going to close with today, is in Romans 12:1. "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."

I don't want to end our study thinking about animals and blood, the gory part of an altar. But we need to always remember that an altar was a place to connect with the living God. An altar did not change the fact that you and I need to live in obedience.

We need to come with a broken spirit, and we need to regularly present our bodies as a living sacrifice, which is the greatest spiritual worship that we have the opportunity to do.

I hope that this strikes a chord in you that it does to me, because I'm being helped to see the importance of God's relationship with His people, and their devotion to Him in this altar, this tabernacle, the reality of God in their midst, was very real, very carefully planned out, very important.

In fact, it's the first thing that these men of God that know God do, Noah, Abram, Jacob, Moses. The first thing they do, is build an altar, and then God begins to give them more specific instructions.

Steve: Let's move beyond earth and stones and let's move to a specific altar. That's when He begins giving them directions about bronze, acacia wood. He gives them the dimensions, the measurements. This is a real place that God has designed for His people to meet with Him.

Lets pray:

Father, help us to appreciate and to be able to compass, this mobile and yet specific unit that you designed to be in the midst of the camp, in the midst of your people for 40 years in the wilderness, and later the temple, in the midst of Jerusalem, in the promised land.

You're the one that we want to have our devotion for. We offer ourselves today. Help us to have the qualities that David spoke of, a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart. Help us to have an obedient heart, as Samuel talked about, and help us as Paul in Romans spoke about.

Help us to present ourselves before Your presence regularly. Thank you for meeting there with the people of Israel. Thank you for not staying on the mountain. Thank you for not staying in heaven. Thank you for coming down to Earth and being near your people.

We avail ourselves of the opportunities that we have today through Christ, to draw near to God, knowing that you will draw near to us. Speak to our hearts, encourage us. I pray that you'll bless those that are battling sickness and illness. Bless Scott today, and bless us all in Jesus name. Amen.

Scott: That's our show for this week, folks. Thanks for joining us for the Building Faith Families podcast with Steve Demme. If you have a question for the show, email Steve at spdemi@Gmail.com. If you have a question for me, you can reach me at scott@unsocializedmedia.com. Thanks for joining us. Have a great week.