

BFF308 The Horns of the Altar

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: Last week, I was in Georgia and had a wonderful time meeting with a couple men, seeking God together. We've been doing Zoom calls for a year, and we thought it would be nice to be face-to-face for a couple days to seek God together, and not have to be in a hurry, and not have to worry about technology, so we did it.

Today we're going to continue with the bronze altar. In my study, I've discovered that God gave Moses instructions on the mountain, then he came down from the mountain, the people had cast off restraint and made the golden calf, then he went back up the mountain, and when he came down, he gave similar instructions. As we consider the horns of the altar, there are therefore two similar passages, with a couple little differences.

Exodus 27:1-8, "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, and you shall make horns for it on its four corners. Its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze.

"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.

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

Let's Pray:

Father help us, once again, to line up our thinking with Yours. What You see as important, we want to treat as important. What You've designed, we want to appreciate, and understand, and pursue. While this would not have been on my top 10 list, You've put it on top of my list, and so I've been pursuing it, at Your direction. I pray that as we study it, we'll be more rooted and grounded in the things of Christ, and we'll also see Jesus in our study. Give us teachable ears and eyes today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Steve: Acacia wood is amazing wood. It's probably the only wood that was available to them when they were in the wilderness, and so they were limited, but this wood lasts a long time. This altar could have lasted 400 years.

I don't know if it would have without the bronze over it, but with the overlay of bronze, it would have lasted a long time. It was hollow, so it was practical. It'd be very difficult to lift up a bronze altar, made of bronze, and carry it through the wilderness.

I'm going to cover two new words today. The words are, "raba," which means "square," used four times in the Bible, and it comes from the root, "arba."

Hebrew is all about the consonants, so you see the R and the B in both words and the root "arba" means "four." As a math guy, I know that a square has four sides and the altar is a square.

The next word we have is for horns, "qeren." There's a couple interesting things about this word. These horns were on the top of the altar and it appears that they were for tying things to the altar.

These horns on the altar in the temple appear at the end of David's reign, when Solomon was coming into his kingship. There were two men, Joab and Adonijah who when condemned ran to the altar in the temple and held on to the horns. This was their way of looking for mercy.

The word "qeren" has three consonants Q, R, N. These consonants can also have different vowels. One of the words with "a" replacing "e" is A-R-A-N, Q-A-R-A-N, "qaran" which means to send out rays, or shine. This word is used to describe Moses' face in Exodus 34.

Same consonants, just different vowels. I don't know the significance of this but I like looking at these root words because horns can either be ram's horns or they can be musical horns.

They both have the same spelling Q-E-R-E-N, but in Hebrew would have different meanings. They're either musical horns or they are ram's horns or animal horns, which is probably what we have on the bronze altar.

Picture a bronze altar that is five by five square cubits, with four sides, three cubits high. It's got a grating on the bottom to catch the ashes. It also has poles and rings to hold the poles. It's hollow in the sense that it's light enough to carry.

When I think of this altar with the horns, all I see is Jesus tied to those four horns. I see a cross. I see Jesus at the four points of the altar across the top with his arms and feet tied. He is our sacrifice.

He was tied to those horns. I attribute this thought to a longer passage. I'm going to read the whole thing. It's from Psalm 118, a very powerful and significant psalm. I'm going to start in the 22nd verse.

"The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." We know that's Christ. "This is Jehovah's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which Jehovah has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

"Oh Jehovah, do save. We beseech You. Oh Jehovah, we beseech You. Do send prosperity. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of Jehovah." We know that Jesus said He's not returning to His people, perhaps us until we look up with our eyes and say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of Jehovah." (Matthew 23:39)

We need to want him to come back. We were talking right before we officially started our podcast this morning about difficulties all around us. My prayer list for people battling cancer, physical ailments as well as COVID, continues to grow. This list seems to be mounting with the number of people that are suffering. Life can be rough. But this is not our prime motivation for wanting Jesus to return, we want Him back because we love Him.

May God help us to cry out with all our hearts on a regular basis. "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of Jehovah." The rest of that verse, "We have blessed you from the house of Jehovah."

Here's the verse I'm looking for, Psalm 118:27, "Jehovah is God. He has given us light. Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar." This verse is one of the main reasons why I see Jesus on the horns of the altar.

The rest of the Psalm is all good. "You are my God and I give thanks to You. You are my God, I extol You. Give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good, for His loving kindness is everlasting."

Consider 1 Corinthians 5: 7–8, "Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump as you are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

There are other passages about horns. I was surprised when I read Revelation 9:13, "The sixth angel sounded. I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar," which is before God. One saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

Notice there is a golden altar before God that has four horns. Amazing to me, that what God showed Moses on the mount is still functional in Revelation.

Scott: What are the odds that people hearing that passage from Revelation for the first time? What are the odds that -- especially, Jewish people -- they would make that connection? From what I've heard about other passages and such, it seems there's a good chance they'd hear about the four horns of the golden altar, and they would automatically see that altar that they've been using for centuries.

Steve: This is a good question. I don't have a ton of Jewish friends. I have had a few and I knew a whole bunch more about the Bible than they did. We have an assumption that people that are Jewish read the Old Testament. I don't think they do, as a whole.

I have been to Israel three different times. The first time I was there, I was coming home on El Al, the Israel Airlines Jet. I got a chance to walk around a little bit. I'm

standing in the back of the plane talking to a man who's Jewish. While we're talking, I'm looking for opportunities to share my faith. I made a reference to Solomon, thinking this would be a good common entry point. He said, "Who's Solomon?" I was taken aback.

Not only was he Jewish, he had attended Jewish schools. He had gone to a Jewish high school. Yet, he didn't know who Solomon was.

What I've been told is that the nation of Israel today, which you would think would be religious in nature, has only a small percentage, maybe single digit, of people that we would call religious Orthodox. The rest of the nation is pretty secular.

We see the connection here between the horns of the golden altar and the horns of the altar of the tabernacle and the temple. But to know how much these folks read scripture, I don't know. I don't assume it anymore.

I don't even assume that believers in Jesus are reading the Bible through cover to cover every year. I would like to think that they would because I believe this is why God put it in here.

There's a golden altar in Revelation. There's an altar in Ezekiel for the end times, which perhaps we will see in the millennium. The point is that this altar is important to God. It's throughout scripture and it occupies a significant place in Scripture.

Notice these two passages in Exodus 38 and Exodus 27, etc. He talks about...Here's the first sentence, "He made the altar of burnt offering up acacia wood, five cubits was its length and five cubits its breadth." In chapter 38, there is a new expression "the altar of burnt offering".

I looked up burnt offering, "olah" is the Hebrew word, which means "ascent," "that which goes up," like in Exodus 29:18. "You shall offer up in smoke the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the LORD. It is a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to Jehovah."

This offering was going up to God. The phrase "altar a burnt offering" is used 50 times in the Bible. Oftentimes when people read altar, they read "the altar of the burnt offering" or "the burnt sacrifice." The Book of Leviticus is filled with instructions for the Levites and there's a whole bunch of detail about how the Levites were to offer sacrifices and the different kinds of sacrifices.

If nothing else I think it is important to note that the altar was a central focal point of their worship in the tabernacle. Leviticus 6:9-13 to see the importance. "Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying "Command Aaron and his sons that saying this is the law for the burnt offering. The burnt offering itself shall remain on the hearth of the altar all night, until morning, and the fire on the altar is to be kept burning on it.

"The priest is to put on his linen robe and he shall put on undergarments next to his flesh." You know. "He shall take up the ashes to which the fire reduces the burnt offering on the altar, and place them beside the altar, and he shall take off his

garments, put on other garments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place.

"The fire in the altar shall be kept burning on it. It shall not go out, but the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall lay out the burnt offering on it, and offer up in smoke the fat portions of the peace offerings on it. Fire shall be kept burning continually on the altar, it is not to go out."

What a responsibility, if you've ever had fires, to keep them from going out. There's something about these offerings going up, "olah," to God, that were to be kept going. We haven't got to it yet, but it's like the incense. It's the prayers. It's the offerings that are going up, and they were supposed to keep them burning continually. I'm going to touch more on that another day.

Steve: The point of burnt offerings, the point of sacrifices, is to take away our sin, which separates us from God. We want to look at what the scripture says, and then we want to remember the big picture. John 1:29, John the Baptist utters one of the most amazing statements in history. "He saw Jesus coming to him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.'"

This is why we have sacrifices. This is why they're awful. This is why it takes work from the Levites. This is why there's smoke and ashes, for sin is nasty, but the main reason we hate sin is it keeps us from our Dad, and this is the whole point of the tabernacle. God wanted to live among His people, but He is holy, He can't live in sin, so we have to take away sin.

Scott: Can I ask real fast? I'm sorry, I'm having thoughts today. When John said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Again, I wondered, the people standing there hearing him say this, surely they knew what a lamb who takes away sin is referring to. That, to me, feels like one of the first big, mind-blowing moments where, "Oh, the Messiah you thought was coming to rescue you from everything is not going to be what you thought he was." Does that makes sense?

Steve: My gut is that when Jesus ascended, he died, he rose from the dead. That when he came back, he talked to the disciples for 40 days, and He explained "This is why I had to do this. This is why I had to do that."

Then, the Spirit of God opened their minds, and they remembered. Remember what he said, "He'll teach you all things and bring to remembrance all things." All of a sudden they started connecting the dots. This was one of the big dots. They probably even said at the time, "What in the world is he talking about?" Later they went, "Oh." That's my gut, but we don't know.

Here's more Scripture to put things in perspective. The book of Hebrews comes to life when you understand Exodus. Hebrew 10:1-14, "Since the law has put a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never by the

same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

"Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered. Since the worshipers having once been cleansed would no longer have any consciousness of sins. In these sacrifices, there is a reminder, sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, He said, "Sacrifices and offerings you've not desired, but a body have you prepared for me. In burnt offerings and sin offerings, you have taken no pleasure.

"Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do Your will, Oh God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'" When He said, "You have neither desired or taken pleasure in sacrifices, in offerings, in burn offerings, in sin offerings -- these are offered according to the law."

Then, he added, "Behold, I have come to do Your will. He does away with the first in order to establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all.

"Every priest stands daily at his service offering repeatedly the same sacrifices which can never take away sins, but when Christ had offered for all time, a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. By a single offering he has perfected for all time, those who are being sanctified."

Steve: What a powerful passage. 2 Corinthians 5, "For our sake, He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." I don't know what else to say, except, amen.

Let's Pray:

Father, thank You for Your great plan. Thank You for all of these carefully designed pieces of the tabernacle to help us to see Jesus more fully. Thank You for priests and altars and burnt offerings. Thank You that by a single offering, Jesus has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Thank You that Jesus endured the cross. Thank You that for the joy that was set before Him, he endured the cross. Thank You for loving us so much that You gave Your only Son to show that love to us. We worship Him and we worship You. Thank You in Jesus name. Amen.

Steve: "For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross." I think His joy is in seeing his Dad reunited with His kids. I think that's what kept him going.

He loved God so much, and he loved us so much, that He says, "I can't wait to reunite them. Take away their sins, wipe away their guilt, wipe away their shame, and watch them run to their Dad." Amen.