

RELISHING SPECIAL PLACES / Sunday, November 9, 2014

Unifying Topic: THE ALTAR, A SIGN OF HOPE

Lesson Text

I. **The Measure Of The Altar** (Ezekiel 43:13-17)

II. **The Purpose Of The Altar** (Ezekiel 43:18-21)

Lesson Text: And when these days are expired, it shall be, that upon the eighth day, and so forward, the priests shall make your burnt offerings upon the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you, saith the Lord God. (Ezekiel 43:27, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Sometimes people seek space in which they can find direction for making the most of life. Where can such space be found? The Israelites could hope for release from their iniquities by making sin sacrifices in the sacred space of the altar that stood before the temple.

Lesson Aim: To review the instructions Ezekiel received for building a new altar and making offerings.

Life Aim: To reflect on the value of finding personal sacred spaces for atonement and renewal.

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- 43:13 And these are the measures of the altar after the cubits: The cubit is a cubit and an hand breadth; even the bottom shall be a cubit, and the breadth a cubit, and the border thereof by the edge thereof round about shall be a span: and this shall be the higher place of the altar.
- 43:14 And from the bottom upon the ground even to the lower settle shall be two cubits, and the breadth one cubit; and from the lesser settle even to the greater settle shall be four cubits, and the breadth one cubit.
- 43:15 So the altar shall be four cubits; and from the altar and upward shall be four horns.
- 43:16 And the altar shall be twelve cubits long, twelve broad, square in the four squares thereof.
- 43:17 And the settle shall be fourteen cubits long and fourteen broad in the four squares thereof; and the border about it shall be half a cubit; and the bottom thereof shall be a cubit about; and his stairs shall look toward the east.
- 43:18 And he said unto me, Son of man, thus saith the Lord God; These are the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon.
- 43:19 And thou shalt give to the priests the Levites that be of the seed of Zadok, which approach unto me, to minister unto me, saith the Lord God, a young bullock for a sin offering.
- 43:20 And thou shalt take of the blood thereof, and put it on the four horns of it, and on the four corners of the settle, and upon the border round about: thus shalt thou cleanse and purge it.
- 43:21 Thou shalt take the bullock also of the sin offering, and he shall burn it in the appointed place of the house, without the sanctuary.

HISTORY:

Ezekiel 43:1-12 The arrival of God's glory in His Temple inaugurates a new era in the relationship of God and His people, and it becomes the focus of the remainder of the vision. The action takes place in the gate facing east, the main temple entrance in the vision, and the equivalent to the gate of the old temple from which God had previously departed. Ezekiel sees God's glory and hears it, describing its sound as a noise of many waters, and its brilliance causing the earth to shine with His glory. The appearance was what he had seen before when God destroyed the city of Jerusalem, and what he had seen at the river of Chebar where he had fallen on his face at the awesomeness and holiness of God. He saw God's glory enter into the Temple and fill it on the east, as he was brought by the Spirit into the inner court (**vv. 1-5**).

God began to speak to Ezekiel from the Temple, as the angel stood by. God calling him Son of man denotes God's divineness and his humanness, for Ezekiel was seeing the place of God's throne, and the place where the sole of His feet will stand—God's dwelling place, the Temple, where He will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel. In that place will be no idolatry and no bodies of any kings sharing His domain, no other entrances erected up for their bodies. What the Israelites had done had polluted His dwelling place. God's Name and Temple will be holy! Now, they were to put away all these things in order for God to dwell in the midst of them forever (**vv. 6-9**).

Ezekiel was to tell them of the Temple that they might be ashamed of their sins. Get them to go over the layout and become the pattern God had measured. And if they are ashamed, show them the whole plan of the Temple: its ins and outs, proportions, regulations, and laws. Draw a picture, meaning, write it down so they can see the design and meaning and live by its design and intent. The radius of the Temple included the top of the mountain and everything around it. And yes, all was to be holy. That was the meaning of the law of the Temple! (**vv. 10-12**).

LESSON:

Ezekiel 43:13-17 The Measure Of The Altar

43:13 And these are the measures of the altar after the cubits: The cubit is a cubit and an hand breadth; even the bottom shall be a cubit, and the breadth a cubit, and the border thereof by the edge thereof round about shall be a span: and this shall be the higher place of the altar. God had told Ezekiel to tell them of His plan that they might be ashamed; maybe if they hear and see the ins and outs, proportions, regulations, and laws, even the measurements they might line up to God specifications and pattern of what He builds. There are specific measurements of how the altar of burnt offering is to be built. God, not the man with the measuring tape gives these measurements. The "burnt offering" speaks of total dedication to the Lord—all on the altar. This is the size of the altar in long cubits. A "cubit" signifies the length from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, depending on the size of the person; a cubit was eighteen to twenty-one inches. It will be in front of the main temple building in the inner area. Ezekiel describes the altar from the bottom to the top. A "hand breadth" is the width of the palm of the hand. A "span" is a measure of length, the distance between the tip of the thumb and the tip of the little finger when the hand is stretched out (the average is about 9 inches). All in all, the height is 3-3½ feet from the base (21 inches high), with a 9 inch rim around its edge, and it extends 21 inches beyond the altar on all sides.

43:14 And from the bottom upon the ground even to the lower settle shall be two cubits, and the breadth one cubit; and from the lesser settle even to the greater settle shall be four cubits, and the breadth one cubit. This first stage speaks of the height of the altar, starting at the bottom—a stone platform. This seems to be in layers, the first area closest to the ground is two cubits tall. The square altar rose above its foundation in three tiers with the largest portion on the bottom. The top tier formed the altar hearth—the firepit, where the priest burned the sacrifices.

43:15 So the altar shall be four cubits; and from the altar and upward shall be four horns. From the narrow platform, still a narrower platform rises 7 feet, and this is the top of the altar, with four horns projecting 21 inches up from the corners. More importantly, the horns of the altar were the place where blood from a sacrificial animal was applied for atonement from sin.

43:16 And the altar shall be twelve cubits long, twelve broad, square in the four squares thereof. The length of the altar hearth (top platform of this altar) will be square on all four sides (twelve cubits long, twelve broad).

¹The altar of Ezekiel 43:16-17 is twelve cubits long and twelve cubits broad. The dimensions thus become an extension of the concept of the Holy of Holies and the altar. God is thus extending and replicating Himself. The structure of the City is based on the selection of the elect who form its structure and dimensions.

43:17 And the settle shall be fourteen cubits long and fourteen broad in the four squares thereof; and the border about it shall be half a cubit; and the bottom thereof shall be a cubit about; and his stairs shall look toward the east. It was so large that it needed steps so that the priest could climb up to reach the top level on which the sacrifices were offered. There were steps up to the top of the altar from the east side. The upper ledge shall be square on all four sides (fourteen cubits long and fourteen broad).

Ezekiel 43:18-21 The Purpose Of The Altar

43:18 And he said unto me, Son of man, thus saith the Lord God; These are the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon. The altar was a special object. It was the means for establishing peace with the people of Israel and the God of Israel. Altars also were places of God's presence. The Lord God called Ezekiel, Son of man, declaring that these were the ordinances or regulations for the altar to offer burnt offerings. On the day they finished it, upon it they were to begin with the burnt offerings, sprinkling or flinging the blood against it. ²These Israelites, who had been in captivity, had lost all contact with the ordinances of the temple and the altar. The sprinkling of blood was an important part of the worship. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. It was the shed blood of Jesus Christ which atoned for our sins. The altar of burnt offering then came to signify more of a sense of reconciliation or mediation.

43:19 And thou shalt give to the priests the Levites that be of the seed of Zadok, which approach unto me, to minister

¹ <http://www.ccg.org/c/CB108.html>

² <http://www.lovetheLord.com/books/ezekiel/45.html>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

unto me, saith the Lord God, a young bullock for a sin offering. The worshiper brought a sacrificial animal to the altar, to the Levitical priest to be sacrificed, where it was burned and thereby given to God. The acceptance of the offerings by the priest symbolized God's acceptance, manifest in blessings (Exodus 20:24) and covenant renewal. In this case a young bullock was brought to the seed or family of Zadok, the priest, who were the only ones to approach God to minister to Him.

43:20 And thou shalt take of the blood thereof, and put it on the four horns of it, and on the four corners of the settle, and upon the border round about: thus shalt thou cleanse and purge it. The next procedure was to take the blood and smear it on the four horns that project from the four corners of the top of the ledge, and all around the lip. This is to purify the altar and make it fit for the sacrifice.

43:21 Thou shalt take the bullock also of the sin offering, and he shall burn it in the appointed place of the house, without the sanctuary. Then the priests were to take the bullock for the sin offering and burn it in outside the sanctuary (the appointed place) of the Temple.

³*"The altar was the place of substitutionary sacrifices—the place of death. There the blood was poured out, and the body was consumed by fire, which speaks of judgment. The altar in the tabernacle stood between the gate of entrance and the door to fellowship with God. It barred the way so that no approach to God was possible except by the altar.*

SUMMARY:

⁴The substance of the prophet's vision now returns to a description of parts of the temple area and regulations concerning the temple's future use. At the very heart of the temple was its altar; the prophet first describes the altar, and then indicates the procedures by which it would be put to use once again.

The description of the altar (vv. 13-17). The altar was a large, stone structure located in the inner court of the temple compound. God gives Ezekiel the dimensions of the altar, using the long (twenty-one-inch) ruler. The gutter at its base is twenty-one inches deep and twenty-one inches wide, with a four-inch lip around its edge. The height of the altar is three and a half feet from the base to the first ledge and twenty inches wide. From the first ledge to the second ledge it is seven feet high and twenty-one inches wide. The altar hearth is another seven feet high. Four horns stick upward from the hearth twenty-one inches high. The top of the altar, the hearth, is square, twenty-one by twenty-one feet. The upper ledge is also square, twenty-four and a half feet on each side, with a ten-and-a-half-inch lip and a twenty-one-inch-wide gutter all the way around. The steps of the altar ascend from the east (TMB).

The laws for the use of the altar (vv. 18-21). God lets Ezekiel know that these are the ordinances for conduct at the altar when it is built, for sacrificing burnt offerings and sprinkling blood on it. For a sin offering, they were to give a bull to the priests, the Levitical priests who are from the family of Zadok who come into God's presence to serve Him. They were to cleanse and purify it by smearing the blood on the four horns, ledge and rim of the altar making. Then take the bull for the sin offerings and burn it in the place set aside for this in the courtyard outside the Sanctuary.

APPLICATION:

God never wants things half done. He never wants anything He has specified to not be done. When God can trust you with His measurements He can trust you with His plans. He delights in and takes pleasure in giving this special place of meeting, the right measurements. God has always been specific about what He desires for His people. This is all to get His people back on the right track. He wants to fill a clean "house!" A builder has to have the right measurements, and as he follows them exclusively, the plan will always come out right. Our hope is always in God's exact plan!

³ <http://bible-christian.org/discussion/response106.html>

⁴ <http://www.family-times.net/commentary/consecrating-the-altar/>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>