

The Altar of Burnt Offering

“And he made the altar of burnt offering of shittim wood: five cubits was the length thereof, and five cubits the breadth thereof; it was foursquare; and three cubits the height thereof” (Exodus 38:1).

For almost forty years it has been my privilege to crisscross this country and even travel overseas in Gospel ministry. Although I possess a few other qualities (very few), my primary calling in life, and my basic role, is that of a preacher. I preach the Bible; I preach Christ; I preach salvation by God’s amazing grace. Consequently, most folks who are familiar with me see and know me as “a preacher.”

The same idea was manifested in New Testament times. When Simon was in Joppa, for instance, we are told that he stayed with “Simon, a tanner” (Acts 9:43). The Apostle Paul mentioned one who opposed him, “Alexander, the coppersmith” (2 Timothy 4:14). While Jesus was referred to once as “the carpenter” (Mark 6:3), He was clearly set forth in prophecy and in life as “a Saviour” (Isaiah 19:20; Luke 2:11).

In both the second and third books of the Bible, the brazen altar is labeled “the altar of burnt offering” (Exodus 30:28; 31:9; 38:1; Leviticus 4:25, 30, 34). As the above individuals were identified by their roles, this title identified the role of the brazen altar. While the materials and measurements were important, the message of the altar was more important. As “the altar of burnt offering,” it helps us focus on the cross and its vital message.

This altar, like the cross, confronted the people with their offences! The brazen altar was a stark reminder that sins had been committed and atonement must be made. As the offender came to “the altar of burnt offering,” sin was judged and the wages of sin paid in the divinely approved sacrifice. As we realize that God’s Best, His only begotten Son, died for our sins on the cross, we are made aware of the awfulness of our sins.

This altar, like the cross, confronted the people with their offering! Before the innocent sacrifice was slain, the guilty Israelite would lay his hand on the animal’s head. This portrayed a transfer of guilt to the sacrifice and a transfer of purity to the offender. Similarly, in the offering of our Substitute on the cross, God “made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This altar, like the cross, confronted the people with their opportunity! It might be said that the brazen altar opened a path into the presence of God. Through the offering and through the high priest, the people could approach God. And through Christ, our Substitute, Who is also our Great High Priest, we have the opportunity of fellowship with God. Through Him and His redemptive work, may we “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:22).