

April - June 2015

The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

THE TABERNACLE OF GOD

Part 15

“And thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof shall be three cubits. And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt overlay it with brass. And thou shalt make his pans to receive his ashes, and his shovels, and his basons, and his fleshhooks, and his firepans: all the vessels thereof thou shalt make of brass. And thou shalt make for it a grate of network of brass; and upon the net shalt thou make four brasen rings in the four corners thereof. And thou shalt put it under the compass of the altar beneath, that the net may be even to the midst of the altar. And thou shalt make staves for the altar, staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with brass. And the staves shall be put into the rings, and the staves shall be upon the two sides of the altar, to bear it. Hollow with boards shalt thou make it: as it was shewed thee in the mount, so shall they make it.” (Exodus 27:1-8)

The previous two chapters of the book of Exodus have been concerned with the vessels and materials that formed the Tabernacle: the Holy Place and the innermost Holy of Holies. Now in chapter 27, the focus shifts to the outer court which surrounded the Tabernacle.

The order in which the Holy Spirit has given these details may appear somewhat strange to the casual reader – almost ‘back to front’. For example, the furniture is described before the tent; the roof before the walls; the Ark of the Covenant before any of the structure in which it was housed. In these verses the first of the utensils of the outer court is detailed, before any explanation of the courtyard itself is given. There must be a reason for this sequence of information. Indeed, there is God-inspired, Divine order here.

In the Holy Place of the Tabernacle there were three items contained: the Table of Shewbread, the Golden Lampstand and the Altar of Incense. The first two of these have already been addressed in Scripture, but not yet the third; neither will it be, until Exodus chapter 30 is reached. The intervening portion deals with the subject of the High Priest and his appointment. The Altar of Incense is not described, until there was a priest to function at the Altar. Never forget that in all these details, Moses was being shown patterns of things in the heavens (cf Hebrews 8:5, 9:23). Everything has spiritual significance – even the order in which they are revealed.

The subject of this article is the Brazen Altar, the largest of all the items of the Tabernacle, about 7 ½ feet square, and 4 ½ feet tall. Counter-intuitively given its purpose, the altar was in fact made of shittim wood, and then overlaid with brass. Set half-way up on the inside was a grating of brass upon which the fire and the sacrifices could be laid, while at each of its four corners was a protrusion or ‘horn’ to which beasts could be secured by ropes. Rings and staves were provided to facilitate its movement from place to place when Israel journeyed. The weight of so large an item, clad in metal, would have required numerous men to bear it when transported. It was also supplied with a variety of basins, pans, hooks and shovels made of brass, all of which were necessary to the operation of the Altar, and making of sacrifices.

The size of the Altar and its location indicate its immense importance. It was situated immediately inside the entrance of the outer court: “*And thou shalt set the altar of the burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation*” (Exodus 40:6). Any person approaching the Tabernacle in the wilderness would have been confronted by the Altar first of all. What a sight it would have been! Animals awaiting slaughter, fire kindling on the grate, copious amounts of blood in evidence, the smell of burning, smoke spiralling into the heavens, and a solemn awe pervading the entire scene.

This procedure continued every day, and no-one could enter the Tabernacle courts other than by coming this way, and being faced by the Brazen Altar and all that it represented. For this Altar was at the very heart of the whole Levitical system, and unto it the sinner had to come with the appointed sacrificial victim. It was in constant operation: *“And the fire upon the altar shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out: and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and lay the burnt offering in order upon it; and he shall burn thereon the fat of the peace offerings. The fire shall ever be burning upon the altar; it shall never go out”* (Leviticus 6:12-13). There it stood – ever smoking, ever blood-stained, ever open – to any guilty Hebrew who sought it out.

Consider the glorious subject of the Altar in more detail:

1. Its Position

The Altar was situated within the courtyard of the Tabernacle, and not on the outside. How accurate are these symbols! How this simple detail refutes so much of what today might be called ‘sound gospel preaching’! The New Testament does **not** teach universal salvation, nor does it set forth the sacrifice of Christ as being offered to all mankind. No – it is for His elect; it is for those whom ‘the Lord our God shall call’ (cf Acts 2:39); it is for those who are appointed thereunto (cf 1 Thessalonians 5:9).

The Old Testament types are in perfect accord with this doctrine. No lamb was provided for the Egyptians on the Passover night, when the Angel of Death went through the land (cf Exodus 12). On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest confessed upon the head of the scapegoat only the sins of Israel (cf Leviticus 16:21). So here – the Altar provided was for a chosen people. Had it been intended for the benefit of all the races in the wilderness, it might then have been placed outside the court – but this was not the case.

2. Its Materials

Shittim wood and brass were the substances used in its construction. As gold speaks of glory, and silver of redemption, so brass signifies judgment, and has a generally evil association. The reprobate descendants of Cain became artificers in brass (cf Genesis 4:22); Samson was bound in fetters of brass (cf Judges 16:21); the armour and helmet of the heathen champion Goliath were of brass (cf 1 Samuel 17:5-6), and so too were king Saul's, which David significantly refused to wear (cf 1 Samuel 17:38-39). When remonstrating with rebellious Israel, God charged them thus: "*I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass*" (Isaiah 48:4). In connection with the deliverance of His true people from the prison-house of sin, the Lord says: "*He hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder*" (Psalm 107:16). These, and many other Scriptures, give some idea of the connotations of this particular metal.

The acacia or shittim wood has been dealt with at length in a previous article (see The Link, April – June 2012). It speaks of the sinless, and therefore incorruptible, humanity of the Mediator. And this timber was used in construction of the altar. The choice may appear strange: a wooden base for an ever-burning altar. However, this shittim wood is a type of Christ's perfect humanity, by virtue of which He was personally impervious and exempt from the penalties of sin. Death had no claim upon Christ, for death is the consequence of sin, and Christ was sinless. Yet in condescending to become flesh and blood, verily human, the Saviour had the capacity to die. Not an inevitable death, but a voluntary one, hence He declared, 'I lay down My life of Myself' (cf John 10:18). Those acacia boards setting forth Christ's impeccable humanity, overlaid in brass symbolising Divine judgment, point to the capability of the Saviour to **endure** the wrath of God. "*I have laid help upon one that is mighty*" (Psalm 89:19) says Jehovah. Like the bush at Horeb, it burned with fire and yet was not itself consumed (cf Exodus 3:2).

3. Its Meaning

A reverential atmosphere characterised the outer court of the Tabernacle where the Altar stood, and sacrificial blood stained the ground. A terrible demonstration of the seriousness of sin and holiness of God was constantly being given. It was not the love of God, but rather His unmitigated holiness that was so graphically portrayed by the Altar and the offerings. Nevertheless, it was at this particular spot that God first met with His people; their initial acquaintance was made at the Altar: *“This shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord: where I will meet you, to speak there unto thee. And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory”* (Exodus 29:42-43).

The Altar stood at the doorway to the Tabernacle court. If an Israelite rejected the Brazen Altar and would not come this way, then he forever shut himself away from God – for there was no other means of access. What accurate typology this is! The one and only place where God meets with the guilty sinner is at Calvary. This is the only ground whereon sinful man and Holy God may be reconciled – the place where His only begotten Son, the Lamb of His providing, was sacrificed – the one offering for sin for ever. If an unsaved person attempts to by-pass the cross, or approach by another way, they will never come into vital contact with the True and Living God, but rather exclude themselves from His mercy.

There is no place on earth, or in the Christian’s experience, as holy as Calvary. The sanctity of all the vessels of the Tabernacle is evident, but the Brazen Altar is twice styled as “Most Holy” (cf Exodus 29:37, 40:10). The reason is not hard to understand. For it was at Calvary, the Altar of Christ’s sacrifice, that the holiness of God was so signally and solemnly manifested; a holiness so great that He spared not His own Son when the sins of His people were laid upon Him.

4. Its Dimensions

“And thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof shall be three cubits” (Exodus 27:1). Nowhere was the wondrous grace of God to poor sinners displayed as at the cross. Never was a ransom wrought so inestimably costly, and so utterly unmerited. It was provided by God as an act of pure grace; not on sudden impulse, but calculated from all eternity. God’s Lamb was ‘foreordained before the foundation of the world’ (cf 1 Peter 1:20). *“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began”* (2 Timothy 1:9). This great work has occupied the mind and will of Almighty God ‘from everlasting’, such that He says: *“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion”* (Romans 9:15). Here are set forth the measurements, and dimensions of the work of Calvary. Like the Altar it was conducted according to a foreordained and Divine plan.

The Altar is also described as being ‘foursquare’ – it was equal in its width and length, and four-cornered. This is an important detail, suggestive in Scripture of geographical entirety (cf Isaiah 11:12, Mark 13:27, Revelation 7:1, 20:8). The cross of Christ has a world-wide application; the salvation that He accomplished was not for believing Jews only, but equally to Gentiles. Even Jewish High Priest Caiaphas, *“prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad”* (John 11:51-52). The ‘remnant according to the election of grace’ are to be found among every nation under heaven. For which reason, the gospel is to be preached throughout all the earth; the **general** call, by means of which, the Lord’s people will be **effectually** called, and ultimately be caused to testify: *“...Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”* (Revelation 5:9).

5. Its Horns

On each corner of the Altar there was provided a 'horn', which was used for tying down and securing the sacrifice. The Psalmist speaks of this: "*God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar*" (Psalm 118:27). Symbolically, these horns represent Christ's unflinching purpose. He was absolutely bound to that goal. Nothing would deter Him from pouring out His soul as an offering for sin. What held Him to the actual cross? Was it the nails? Indeed it was not. It was devotion to His Father's will, and adherence to the Covenant of Grace. He was bound to those horns.

6. Its Utensils

These included a quantity of instruments and vessels for use with the Altar, however the function of only one is described, namely pans 'to receive the ashes' (cf Exodus 27:3). There is a further reference to this operation: "*And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put upon his flesh, and take up the ashes which the fire hath consumed with the burnt offering on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar. And he shall put off his garments, and put on other garments, and carry forth the ashes without the camp unto a clean place*" (Leviticus 6:10-11). 'The ashes which the fire hath consumed' – these gave the unmistakable evidence of the thoroughness of the fire's work in having completely consumed the offering. To the offerer they were a token that the sacrifice was over, and his sins were dealt with. The words of Christ on the cross express the glorious fulfilment of this type. 'It is finished' was the cry that was heard from the darkness of Golgotha. The fires of God's wrath had completely burnt out upon Him. All the sins of all His people were utterly and completely consumed. The sacrifice had been offered and accepted and had ascended unto God as a sweet savour. The ashes were the token of destruction. At Calvary, the blessed Redeemer reduced all His people's sins to ashes, and bore them away, and conveyed them forever 'without the camp'.

7. Its Covering

Once the Tabernacle was set up, and the Altar in place in the outer court, it was in perpetual use. Never did its fire go out. The only exceptions to this rule would be those occasions when the children of Israel moved camp in the wilderness. This was the purpose of the rings and the staves – for transport when such journeys occurred. Like the other articles in the Tabernacle, the Altar was to be covered when it was moved. This process is described: *“And they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth thereon: And they shall put upon it all the vessels thereof, wherewith they minister about it, even the censers, the fleshhooks, and the shovels, and the basons, all the vessels of the altar; and they shall spread upon it a covering of badgers’ skins, and put to the staves of it”* (Numbers 4:13-14).

When travelling, all the vessels of the Tabernacle were covered, but the Altar was the only item to be wrapped in purple – the royal colour. Why this distinction? Because the sufferings of Christ the Mediator are indissolubly linked with His regal glory. The latter follows upon the former. The apostle speaks concerning this: *“Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand **the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow**”* (1 Peter 1:10-11). The Lord also, addressing the two upon the Emmaus Road asked: *“Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?”* (Luke 24:26).

This is the great truth contained in the Philippian epistle, which speaks of: *“Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death,*

even the death of the cross. **Wherefore** God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:6-11).

However, over the wondrous purple cloth was cast a humble covering of badgers’ skins. Once more, this tells of the world’s total inability to see in Christ anything more than a mere man. They observe ‘no beauty that they should desire Him’ (cf Isaiah 53:2). But true believers, who through sovereign grace have been enlightened, and caused to see within the veil, behold the royal splendour of His glorious person. “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious” (1 Peter 2:7); they ‘bring forth the royal diadem and crown Him Lord of All’; they bow before His holy throne; they fall adoring at His feet, saying: “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:5-6).

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

“Let us then not dare to stop or stay [outside the] court, for there is not this altar. Nor let us dare, when we come into this court to be careless whether we look to this altar or no. For it is by blood we must enter; ‘for without shedding of blood is no remission’ (cf Hebrews 9:22). Let us always then, when we come hither, wash our hands in innocency, and so compass this holy altar (cf Psalm 26:6): for that by Christ, who is the altar indeed, we are reconciled to God. This is looking to Jesus; this is coming to God by Him, of Whom this altar and the sacrifice thereon was a type.”

J. Bunyan (1628 – 1688)

THE BRAZEN ALTAR

Reconciliation was made upon the altar (cf Leviticus 8:15). This was effected by the priests, who sprinkled upon it the blood of the atoning victims, and also put their carcasses, or certain pieces of them, on the fire to be consumed. Here, day by day, continually new victims were slain, fresh blood was poured out, and the fire, which ever cried ‘give, give’, was fed. The blood shed, and poured out before and sprinkled upon the altar, was an atonement for the sins of the people. The death of the victim signified that the offerer deserved to die for his transgressions, and that its life was substituted and accepted for his. The burning of it signified the punishment due to sin. This was the appointed means of propitiating Jehovah; in other words, of procuring remission of sins, averting deserved wrath, such as the plague or other judgments, and securing to the people of Israel the continuance of the privileges and blessings which they enjoyed. These, which were mainly temporal in their nature, were participated in by all Israel, but pious Israelites were more highly favoured, for they were partakers not only of temporal, but of spiritual and eternal blessings. And we believe that many, if not all, of those who were Israelites indeed, had glimpses more or less distinct through the altar and the sacrifices of the coming Messiah.

The brazen altar was a type of the cross – the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died. He, the one great sacrifice for sin, was offered up on it. As reconciliation was made upon the altar, so the end of all the sacrifices was attained by that which was presented on the cross. *“And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled”* (Colossians 1:20-21). See, in the blood shed at, and sprinkled upon,

the altar the type of that blood which cleanseth from sin; and in the lamb that was slain and offered upon it every morning and evening, ‘The Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world’. Yea! in every bleeding victim, see that one great sacrifice: ‘Him who was once offered to bear the sins of many’. And see in the priests who served at the altar, Him who, in the fulness of time, offered Himself. Christ is both Priest and Sacrifice. No priest but Himself could have ministered at this altar, and no victim but Himself could have bled and died on it for [sin]. The brazen altar, and the varied sacrifices which were offered on it, had no meaning, if they did not typify Christ. The blood of the sin offerings was sprinkled on the altar’s horns, which were symbols of power, protection, and salvation.

The altar was sometimes used as a place of sanctuary, where certain transgressors (such as those who had sinned ignorantly) were shielded by Divine authority from the punishment to which their sins had made them liable. Others – to whom the law did not regard it as a refuge – sometimes fled to it in the vain hope of escaping the desert of their sin. Thither, you remember, Adonijah fled from the wrath of Solomon, and laid hold on the horns of the altar, and continued there until he received the king’s pardon (cf 1 Kings 1:50-53). Thither, also, fled the wicked and treacherous Joab, and laid hold of the same horns, but they availed him not, for he was slain there by the king’s command (cf 1 Kings 2:28-34). But blessed be God, there is an altar, that will prove a sanctuary to every sinner, however vile and wicked, that flees to it. No sooner are its horns, the outstretched arms of Him who bled and died on it for the chief of sinners, grasped by faith, than the penitent clinging one receives the King’s pardon, hears a voice coming down from the excellent glory, saying, “*I, even I, am He who blotteth out thy transgressions*” (Isaiah 43:25).

Blessed Jesus, when to Thy cross we flee, and by faith lay hold on Thee, we are safe. The thunders of God’s wrath may roll over our

heads, and the lightnings of His vengeance flash all around us; our sins, like mountains may rise up before us, and the law may cry for judgment; and devils and wicked men may unite for our destruction – but none of these things can move us, harm us, or endanger our safety, while in our arms we hold Thee, blessed Jesus! Have you, dear friend, fled to this stronghold and laid hold of these horns of salvation? If not, you are safe nowhere else. If you would escape the desert of sin, the wrath and curse of God, flee now to Christ, and by faith lay hold of Him!

The altar was a very conspicuous object in the court. It stood in the centre, and on entering, was right before the worshipper, who could not fail to be impressed with its square and massive form, its bright and blood-stained exterior, its blazing and smoking fire, and its white-robed and ministering priests. If the type of the crucifixion was so very conspicuous in the court, how much more so should the crucified Christ Himself be in the New Testament Church? As the pious Hebrew on entering the gate leading to the sacred precincts could not miss seeing the brazen altar, so believers when visiting the house of God, should ever behold Jesus as its greatest attraction. The minister who does not make the cross the grand theme of his preaching, need not expect to lead sinners to the Saviour. As the altar was the most prominent of the holy vessels in the Tabernacle court, and as the cross is the principal object held up by faithful servants of God in the Christian sanctuary, and around which the thoughts and affections of His people cluster, so Christ will be the chief attraction of the New Jerusalem. And if we are among the number of His saints, its gates will open to admit us when we die, and as we enter, we will behold right before us, and in the very midst, heaven's greatest and grandest sight, for the first scene that will burst upon our wondering and admiring gaze will be 'the Lamb that once was slain'.

William Brown (1874)

LOOKING TO THE ALTAR

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ! You are to make use of truths such as these. Under the consciousness of your own guilt, fresh-contracted guilt, you are to look again and again to that altar. I speak to those amongst you who know what it is to feel fresh defilement – you who know that this leads to various reasonings and arguments, which the devil is always ready to blow into a flame. He it is who is ever at hand to suggest such a thought as these: ‘You, you who have been a professor of Christianity for so many years, you do this; you say the other?’ And, then, the poor Christian is struck dumb. He knows this to be fact. But his answer ought not to be, ‘Well, I hope the day will come when I shall not contract fresh defilement; I hope the day will come when I shall be holy’. For, if he understands his Bible, he must know the day will never come when he shall be one whit more holy in this sense! But he ought rather to say: ‘What is the use of the altar? What is the use of fire continually burning upon the altar, if I am not again and again to look to the Sacrifice which has been offered upon that altar?’

And again, you are to make use of these truths when doubts and fears fill the mind, as they too often do. Perhaps the devil suggests the thought: ‘It may be that the truths this book contains are not realities’. Oh, brethren, in the midst of all your doubts and fears, run to the altar, and resolve all by looking to the altar. And... under a sense of the stirring corruption which fills the breast, I believe nothing will enable you to keep down the evil heart of unbelief so effectually as looking to Him who was the sacrifice upon the altar, who is Himself the altar. It is faith in the Lord Jesus which can alone subdue the inward corruption which fills the breast, and give strength and vigour to the soul. It is under the precious drops of the cross of Christ we renew our strength.

W. H. Krause (circa 1850)

THE SACRIFICE BOUND

“God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar” (Psalm 118:27).

Of the purpose and use of the ‘horns’ on the Brazen Altar, little detail is given in Scripture, beyond this statement toward the end of the 118th Psalm. However, their function may be readily guessed at. These solid upright protrusions, made in the same metal which plated the altar, and around which ropes could be passed, would be of particular utility for the tying-up of beasts awaiting slaughter; for hoisting carcasses on to the grate; or for the fastening down of larger offerings once situated upon the altar. By virtue of these horns and accompanying cords, the sacrificial animal having been led into the court was then ‘bound’ to its destiny as a burnt offering, both physically and metaphorically.

The principle of shackling a sacrificial victim is also illustrated in the unique example of Isaac. For although it is evident that this young man made no attempt to resist or escape the intentions of his centenarian father Abraham, yet it is recorded: *“And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and **bound** Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood”* (Genesis 22:9). The restraining of his willing and complicit son evidences that the act of binding had a figurative rather than a practical purpose.

The great fulfilment of these Old Testament types is seen in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, the *“one sacrifice for sins for ever”* (Hebrews 10:12). He was likewise ‘bound’ to the altar of Calvary, both before and during the time when He ‘offered Himself’. There were no physical altar-horns; not even ropes or cords. He was not transixed to the tree by the force of nails only. He described His state and sense of bondage thus: *“I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how*

am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50); *“I must work the works of Him that sent Me”* (John 9:4); *“And it came to pass, when the time was come that He should be received up, He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem”* (Luke 9:51). He was constrained by the cross. A sacrificial death was His **bounden** duty.

Let it then be asked, ‘what were the horns to which the Lamb of God was tied?’, and ‘what were the cords that fastened Him there?’ The Scriptures identify four ‘horns’ – strong reasons, irrefutable principles – by virtue of which, the Saviour had to die.

The Law

The Jews who clamoured around Pilate, seeking sentence against the Lord Jesus, made a profound statement: *“We have a law, and by our law He ought to die”* (John 19:7). The charge of blasphemy which they levelled against Him was fallacious, but their assertion was correct. The Law of God demanded the death of Christ. Because that Law declares on every page: *“the soul that sinneth, it shall die”* (Ezekiel 18:4, 20), and He was: *“made... to be sin for us”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). As soon as the Saviour undertook to be the ‘sin-bearer’, He became subject to all the penalties of the sin-condemning Law. When He *“committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously: Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree”* (1 Peter 2:23-24), there could be only one outcome: the verdict of ‘guilty’ and the sentence of ‘death’.

The very mode of His execution served to illustrate the transaction which had taken place. *“Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree”* (Galatians 3:13); when He was lifted up upon the cross it declared that He was under the curse of the Law, and suffering all its most terrible judgments. When He said: *“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil”* (Matthew 5:17) that included ‘enduring all its condemnation’. The Law was a resolute and formidable horn to which Christ was bound.

The Prophets

The second great cornerstone of the Scriptures is the prophets – those portions where, by word, or type, in ceremonies and living characters, future things were foretold. In particular, details pertaining to the Son of God, the Messiah who was to come. The very first of prophecies, uttered directly by Jehovah (Genesis 3:15), declared that the promised Seed would, in the process of destroying the works of Satan, be smitten Himself. From that time forward, the prophets continued upon the dreadful theme, enumerating the Saviour’s sufferings, from the infanticide and exile at the time of His birth (cf Matthew 2:15-18), to His penultimate mortal words on Calvary (cf John 19:28), including the facts of His betrayal, capture, crucifixion and death. “...*Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life... But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled*” (Acts 3:14-15, 18).

All this was known in its fulness by the omniscient Son of God. In a past eternity He declared, concerning the Scriptures: “*Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me*”, and when upon earth could truly say of the things which befell Him: “*The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of Him*” (Mark 14:21). The prophetic Word of God was another unbreakable ‘horn’ to which the Saviour was indissolubly attached. Though at any moment He might have used His Divine omnipotence to turn stones into bread, or deliver Himself, or summon legions of angels, or come down from the cross – His great concern ever was: “*But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?*” (Matthew 26:54).

The Covenant

Also contained within Holy Writ are the terms of God’s Covenant with humanity: the grounds upon which peace and reconciliation can exist, judgement be averted and blessings may flow. But at every turn,

mankind has proved utterly unable to comply with its conditions; sin and unrighteousness foiling every attempt at conformity. An arbitrator is needed; a guarantor to underwrite the sinner's un-payable debt; a "*daysman betwixt us that might lay His hand upon us both*" (Job 9:33). Such a person is the Lord Jesus Christ, His Divine and human natures combining to make Him perfectly and uniquely suited to this office. "*By so much was Jesus made a Surety of a better testament*" (Hebrews 7:22).

But who would 'go bail' for a bankrupt debtor? This is what Christ has done, in a spiritual sense. The Bible cautions against standing Surety for a friend. The Saviour has undertaken that duty for His enemies. "*He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it*" (Proverbs 11:15), and how He smarted! The full cost of our debt was charged to Him, "*the chastisement of our peace was upon Him*" (Isaiah 53:5). The security and success of that new and better covenant was another motivating cause; a horn by which Christ was bound to the work of the cross.

The Promises

'Exceeding great and precious promises' are given to the people of God: promises of light and life and liberty; of a glorious inheritance with the saints, incorruptible and unfading, reserved for them in heaven. Such is the Will and Testament of God for His spiritual children and heirs. Now, "*...where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth*" (Hebrews 9:16-17). But how could the death of immortal God ever occur? In Christ, the God-man, it did: "*And for this cause He is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death... they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance*" (v. 15). The fulfilment of the promises necessitated first the death of the Saviour.

Speaking of the decease that He would accomplish at Jerusalem, He told His disciples: "*Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you*

that I go away”, “*And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know*” (John 16:7, 14:4). He went unto His death, and the way thither would be one of agonies and pain. These things were expedient, for His elect people’s eternal blessing. He went to prepare a place for them; He went that the Holy Spirit might be sent down; He went that gifts could be given unto men; He died so that it could be said: “*For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us*” (2 Corinthians 1:20). Here was a further ‘horn’, a fourth fundamental reason by which the Lord was bound to Calvary’s Altar.

A Threefold Cord

The four horns around the Brazen Altar doubtless added much to its beauty and appearance, but if they were to be of any use in the securing of sacrificial beasts, there must also be cords wherewith to make the connection. So too in the spiritual antitype and fulfilment. The Law, the Prophets, the Covenant and the Promises are mighty matters indeed, but the simple fact of their being, the knowledge that they existed, is not sufficient to explain why the Second Person of the Godhead would humble Himself to such depths as the death of the cross. With these horns, there are cords of equal strength and glory which bound the Saviour to His work.

There was the cord of **His obedience to the Father**. Though in the Volume of God’s eternal will there were written such terrible details of His sufferings, yet could the Messiah say: “*I delight to do thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart*” (Psalm 40:8). All that He endured, ‘from His youth up’ to His ascension was a measure of His faithful subservience to the Father. With infant lips He said: “*wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?*” (Luke 2:49) and in later years to His disciples: “*My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work*” (John 4:34). On the last dreadful night in Gethsemane, He knelt down and prayed, “*Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Thine, be*

done” (Luke 22:42), and is heard, committing Himself to the Father again, even in the throes of death.

Christ was bound also by ‘the cords of a man, with bands of love’ (cf Hosea 11:4), namely: **His Love for the Elect**. From the foundation of the world, He had rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and delighted in the sons of men – for there were His own dear people to be found: His body, His flock, His brethren, His bride. This love is a cord surpassing knowledge (cf Ephesians 3:19), which cannot be broken or separated: neither by death nor life, principality nor power, things present nor future, height nor depth, nor any other creature (cf Romans 8:37-38). His divine affection for His saints is the binding factor: “*Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour*” (Ephesians 5:2). “*...When Jesus knew that His hour was come... having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end*” (John 13:1), even to the end, or extremity, of laying Himself upon the altar, and being made a sacrifice for their sin.

A threefold cord is not quickly broken (cf Ecclesiastes 4:12), and the Scriptures speak of another holy emotion which inspired the Saviour’s work: He, for “***The joy that was set before Him*** endured the cross, *despising the shame*” (Hebrews 12:2). Whatever horrors were entailed in the accomplishment of redemption’s plan, the prospect of salvation wrought, the Law answered, the prophecies fulfilled, the covenant sealed, and promises kept, brought to the Lord Jesus’ heart joy of such magnitude it could transcend even the death of the cross. And if joy to Him, what rejoicing ought rightly to be theirs, who are the recipients and beneficiaries of these eternal blessings, and the objects of love Divine? May this wondrous hope be an encouragement to all the Lord’s true people, ‘until His blessed face they see; His rest, His joy, His glory share’.

R. J. Steward

EDITORIAL

The altar of the Old Testament era has given rise to a peculiar error in certain branches of the so-called Church – namely the constructing of physical ‘altars’ within their own places of worship, where they dominate the front of the building. This folly of reviving the ‘weak and beggarly elements’ associated with the extinct religion of the Jews should be utterly rejected by right-thinking Christians, for it grievously dishonours Him who is the fulfilment of these types and shadows.

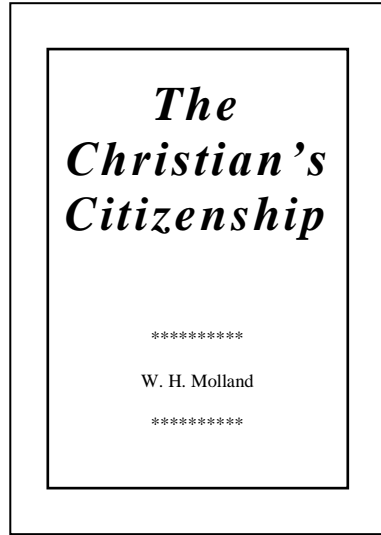
Even in supposedly evangelical Churches where no material altar is reared up, there is often to be found the unbiblical terminology and practice of ‘altar calls’. These represent that ‘other gospel’ of the Arminian, who preaches a salvation wrought in part by Christ, but requiring the resolution and decision-making of sinful man in order to take effect – essentially a system of works, which, like the Jews’ animal sacrifices of old, ‘can never make the comers thereunto perfect’, nor bring them any assurance of sovereign grace.

The altar which predominated the scene in the Tabernacle has only one equivalent, or successor, in the New Testament Church: **Christ, and Him crucified**. And He is to be set forth now, not by rites or ceremonies or visual representations, but by the **preaching of the Word of God**. Let that be the focal point of the congregation, let that take the central place, let that be the substance of the worship service, and the local Church will be accomplishing its God-given purpose.

An Israelite of old could not enter the Tabernacle courts without being confronted by the altar. Likewise, the people of God should so order their Churches that all who enter in are met, first and foremost with the preaching of the Word. For only when this is given its right priority, are sinners challenged, saints comforted, and God glorified.

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Lord's Day 11.00 a.m. & 6.30 p.m.

Preacher : Mr P. Mehrshahi
(Cheltenham)

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