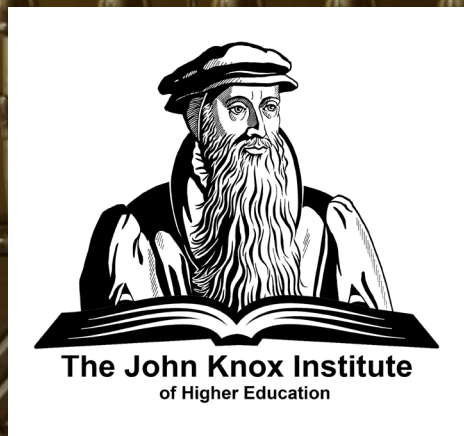


The Tabernacle of Moses

Video Lecture Series
by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture 6 ~
THE BRAZEN ALTAR—part 1



John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

© 2022 by John Knox Institute of Higher Education

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means for profit, except in brief quotations for the purposes of review, comment, or scholarship, without written permission from the publisher, John Knox Institute, P.O. Box 19398, Kalamazoo, MI 49019-19398, USA.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

Visit our website: www.johnknoxinstitute.org

Rev. A. T. Vergunst is minister of the Gospel at the Reformed Congregation of Carterton, New Zealand, a congregation of the Reformed Congregations of New Zealand.

www.rcnz.org

The Tabernacle of Moses

Video Lecture Series

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

1. Introduction
2. The Temple Theme
3. Setting and Organization
4. The Courtyard Fence
5. The Courtyard Gate
6. The Brazen Altar—part 1
7. The Brazen Altar—part 2
8. The Laver
9. The Tabernacle Building
10. The Lampstand
11. The Table of Shewbread
12. The Altar of Incense
13. The Ark of the Covenant

The Tabernacle of Moses

Video Lecture Series

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture 6 ~

THE BRAZEN ALTAR—part 1

Welcome to this sixth study of the Tabernacle of ancient Israel. Today we will focus on the Brazen Altar. And the Scriptures that are describing this Altar are found in Exodus 27, verse 1 to 8; and 29:36 to 46. To get the complete picture, it's important though to read through the passages from Leviticus, especially in the first seven chapters.

Now in our previous lesson, we followed Shema, a Jewish boy, and he had discovered that



there was a big and beautiful door on the east side of the Tabernacle. And as people came in and out, Shema noticed a remarkable difference in these people. Many walked in downcast, as if there was a heavy burden on their heart or on their back, but then coming out, they actually looked relieved, and rejoicing. And yet, when Shema looked closer, he observed that not all of them looked downcast when they went in.

Now right before him, he saw a family carrying a basket of food instead of leading an animal, and they looked happy, they looked joyful as they entered into the Gate. So, he wondered, what is happening behind this gate? And why does the one bring in an animal, and others bring in a basket of food? What makes one look so downcast, and then come out joyful?

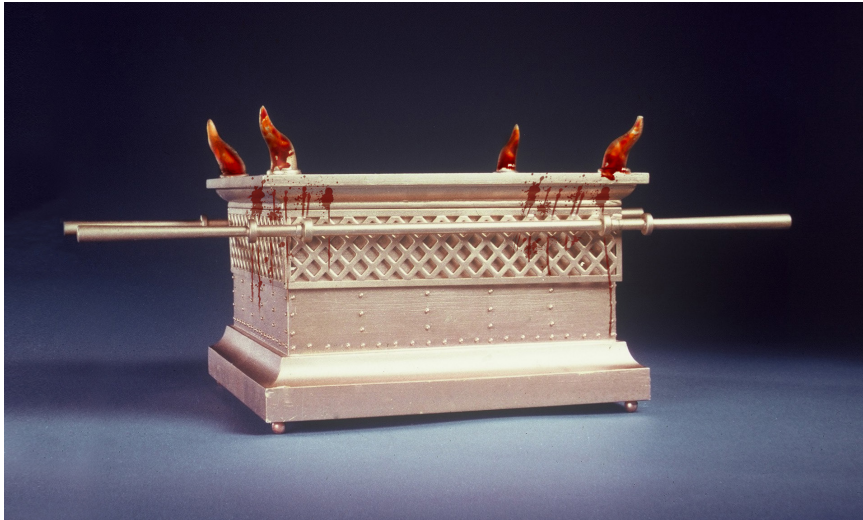
So, Shema needed to enter into the Gate himself, to find out. And very gently, he pushed aside the curtain and he stepped into the Courtyard.

Now the first thing, he couldn't miss it! He saw a huge Altar, with a fiercely burning fire on the top of it. And around the Altar was a beehive of activity. One priest was talking to the family with the lamb. Another was busily butchering an animal, and he was catching the blood in a basin. And one priest was tending the fire and the sacrifice with a large fork on the fire. And looking back at the family with the animal, he saw the father put his hands upon the animal's head, and when he did, he said something, when he was holding his hand on the animal. And right after that, he saw that the priest, he took the lamb, and he slaughtered the lamb, and the family was looking on as the animal was sacrificed. So he was deeply impressed with it all.



Shema took a closer look at the Altar. It was a square box, of about two-and-a-half meters, or maybe seven-and-a-half feet wide, and about one-and-a-half meters tall. It appeared the box was hollow on the inside, and a large grate was fit snugly inside the box, towards the top rim. And on that grate, was the burning sacrifice placed. And bloodstains

could be seen upon the shining brass, but especially on the four horns that were sitting on each of the corners. It seemed that they were purposely smeared with blood, rather than just spattered by the butchery.



On the sides of it, he saw two long poles that were stuck into two sets of brass rings. So clearly, that's how the Altar could be lifted up and carried on the shoulder. To be honest, it smells far from pleasant. The burning meat caused a pungent smell as it burned up in the fire, and besides, he could smell the blood of the animals in the warm and hot weather. But now his eyes

caught sight of the priest, and he was returning to the waiting family. And quietly, the family stood before the priest, and it appeared that the priest was saying something. And then Shema, he almost saw a relief coming on the face of the father and his family as they were listening to the priest. "I wonder what the priest said that made them so happy," Shema thought. So, as the family returned towards the Gate, Shema walked up, and he asked, "What did the priest say to you that made you so joyful? May I ask?" And the father answered him, "The priest said that atonement was made for our sin, by the sacrifice that was offered on the altar. He said that the sacrifice was well-pleasing to Jehovah God, and we are pardoned from our sins." Now, though this all sounded wonderful, Shema wondered how someone's sins could be forgiven by the sacrifice of an animal.

So, after this short introduction, let's dig a little deeper into the gospel message that God is picturing for us in this Brazen Altar. For what happens at this Altar—that is the key to all the rest of what happens in the Tabernacle. I'd like to review with you four main truths that are pictured in this Altar. First, this Altar reveals to us God's way of peace, God's way of atonement or reconciliation. Now secondly, as you would expect, this Altar speaks about the glory of Jesus Christ. Thirdly, this Altar pictures justification by faith. And lastly, the actions of offering with the animal sacrifice reveals to us the role of faith in our salvation.

So, let's first consider how the Altar reveals God's way of atonement or reconciliation. Friends, every aspect of the Altar points to Christ—the fire, the animal sacrifice, the blood caught in that basin, the work of the priest, and even the Altar itself points to the Lord Jesus. Let's think first about the fire on the Altar.

Fire, God has chosen as a symbol of himself. It's a bright picture of his holiness and of his justice. As fire is consuming, so God's holiness and justice are consuming to us as sinners. And all day long, this fire was kept burning. It reveals the truth that, let's be honest, we often forget, too often forget. It reveals that God is displeased with the sinner who dishonors him. And being just and holy, God will not, and God cannot spare a sinner who has transgressed, or continues to transgress his holy law. The truth of Genesis 2 is written everywhere. The sinner shall surely die. Yes, Romans 6 says, "The wages of sin is death." We see it everywhere, friends. No one breaks the law cheaply in any of our countries, but we also do not sin cheaply. When I have despised God's

law of love, I will have to deal with the hand of justice. It was this sense of sin that made that family coming into the temple look so burdened. Their consciences were alarmed. But how can this guilt be taken away? How can I stand in the judgment if God marks my iniquity? How can I be reconciled to this holy One, while I have nothing to offer him in payment? Now the answer to these questions is found in this Brazen Altar. Powerfully, it sets forth God's way of peace, and the way of salvation, through the atoning blood sacrifice.



So, since we have broken God's law, God's justice requires payment—that's fair. I said earlier, "The wages of sin is death." We knew about that in Paradise already. But instead of our death, God provided the way through the death of a given substitute. And in the Tabernacle, the substitutes were the various animals, depending on the nature of your offense. But in reality, all those thousands of animals never did satisfy any demand of God's justice. Animal blood could not be a real substitute for us. And that is because we're dealing with divine-sized guilt that cannot be paid with the blood of animals, or for that matter, not even with our own. We are human—we are limited. He is infinite and divine. Listen to the book of Hebrews, chapter 10, verse 1, making I really clear: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect." So the Brazen Altar points to the greatest altar we've ever seen in the world, and that altar is the cross of Golgotha, upon which the God-given Substitute, Jesus Christ, was nailed. In him, and through him, God provided the atonement, the means of reconciliation—the ransom price.

When John the Baptist introduced the Messiah, he pointed to him, and he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"—John 1:29. And what's most interesting, if you read it in John, the fact that when John treats this, he was standing at Bethabara beyond Jordan, where he baptized the people. You see that in John 1:28. But you know, just at that crossing point in the Jordan River, each year thousands of lambs were herded from Bashan into the direction of Jerusalem. All these lambs were to be sacrificed, as they ran to the field of Bethlehem to be ready to go to Jerusalem. And yet none of those lambs would ever provide a real atonement. Only the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, could do this and has done this. And therefore, upon entry of the Tabernacle, immediately our eyes are pointed towards this blood-stained Altar, with that consuming fire. Now unless we deal with sin and guilt at this Altar, we are not able to draw near to God in his holy throne room pictured in the Holy of Holies.

But why is the death of Jesus Christ able to atone for our sins? How could he satisfy this divine wrath of God and pay every demand of justice? How could he even sustain, this Son of man, the intensity of this divine-sized judgment? Well, good questions. That brings us to our second main truth revealed in this Brazen Altar. It shows us the glory of the person of Jesus Christ—the uniqueness of him.

Shema noticed that the Altar was made of bronze. But what Shema didn't realize, the Altar was actually made of wood, and then covered with bronze. Now that makes sense, to cover a wooden altar with bronze or brass, if you want to use the altar more than once. And this altar had to be used more than once. The bronze kind of enveloped the wood, so no flame or heat could touch or disintegrate the wood inside. It protected it. This made it possible to use the Altar for more than one

person. As a matter of fact, it served thousands, and thousands, and thousands of people.

But how does this picture the glory of Jesus Christ? The wood and the bronze are a picture of the uniqueness of Jesus' two natures. The Savior of sinners is both God and man—real God, real man. His human nature is pictured in the wood, made of the shittim tree in the desert. And just as the shittim tree, so was the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you would look at the shittim tree, you would not see a stately and beautiful, mighty cedar tree, or you wouldn't see a graceful palm tree. No, no, all desert trees are rather grotesque in their shape—rough and deformed almost.

Isaiah 52 or 53 tells us some details of the Messiah. His face and form were marred more than any man, it says. When he grew up, he didn't have any comeliness. There was no beauty that man should desire Jesus, the Messiah. Undoubtedly, undoubtedly this has spiritual references. No one saw in him the promised Messiah, the Savior. For let's be honest. How could the child that came from Nazareth—Nazareth!—to be the chosen One of God, the son of David. But equally true is Jesus' physical appearance was far from glorious. Whether the details of Isaiah 52 or 53 are only spiritual, that's hard to prove. But I doubt not that he wasn't the handsome person people imagine him to be. He wasn't. His suffering image made many to turn away from him, Isaiah prophesied. Clearly, when they looked at Jesus, the Jews concluded, That man is under God's judgment for sin. He simply could not be the promised Messiah, the great son of David, no.

The important point for us is not what Jesus looked like. The important point is that Jesus was real human, real man, like us all, without sin however. But he was not a superman. He was a needy man. He was a man like us who tires, and who was hungry. He was a man who experienced weakness, and sickness. He was a man who trembled, and who cried with great fear when he saw the fearsome cross before him. He begged others to pray with him, as he felt overwhelmed with sorrow. A man, who therefore now can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. Why? Because he experienced the infirmities, like we all do as people. It was necessary that the substitute should be a man, for we men have sinned. And justice requires an eye for an eye, so a man should pay for a man. But how could a man ever be the Savior of sinners? How could he be the substitute, not just for one, or for two, but for an innumerable multitude of guilty people? How does that work? How can he?

And secondly, how could a man bear the full wrath and anger of God against sinners? How could he satisfy the demands of a divine justice, being a man? Well, he could not accomplish that, as any man could, no man could, he couldn't either. He could only do that, friends, because he was at the same time God. Do you see now how this glorious truth of Christ is pictured in the Altar? The bronze, wrapping up the wood, that pictured that the substitute, the Son of man, the last Adam, was also the Son of God. John wrote beautifully in chapter 1, verse 14: "The Word was made flesh." That means, the uncreated God joined himself with human flesh. The infinite God, he stepped, as it were, into finite human nature. And this divine nature supported Jesus when he was laid upon the altar, and when he was made subject to the fierce fire of God's holy anger. How else—how else could any human carry the weight of this eternal punishment?

His divine nature, therefore, gave also his infinite value to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Though he suffered as one human, for a relatively short time, the merits of his sacrifice are infinite in worth. His merits are so infinite in value, that Jesus' death is abundantly able to atone for the innumerable multitude of sins. Jesus is able to save you to the uttermost, when you come through him to God. Never doubt it. Never doubt you're welcome. He is greater, a much greater Savior than we are great sinners together. As the innocent Son of man, he could be our substitute, as he did not need to pay for his own sins. So, as the glorious Son of God, he could be our substitute, able to meet all

God's holy and just demands.

Now, how unspeakably great and wise is God's plan of salvation! We saw that yesterday, the attribute of wisdom. And never could such a thing have come up in the heart of man. So let us conclude our study today with looking at one more detail that Shema also saw. He noticed the four horns on the corners. Each was obviously smeared with the blood of the animal. That was not just decorative. No, Moses had been instructed to tell the priest to put a horn on each corner, and they were probably at times used to tie up a sacrifice animal, and that at least seems to be alluded to in Psalm 118, verse 27, where it says, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar."

But mostly, these horns are pointers to every direction of the compass. It pointed out the wonderful truth that the Messiah of the Jews is not only the Savior of the Jews, but would be the Savior of the world. His message would eventually go to all the corners of the compass. For the gospel was not to be limited to one nation only. Turning to the familiar passage in John 3, notice how Jesus himself expounds the glory of the Altar. But before I quote these verses, let me just point out to you that the Hebrew word, "altar" literally means, "the high place." Every sacrifice had to be lifted up about a meter-and-a-half, upon a high place—the elevated Altar. And knowing that detail, how significant now becomes Jesus' teaching to Nicodemus, in language that is intimately tied



to this Brazen Altar. First, the Lord said to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up"—lifted up on high for sinners. In other words, lifted up on the Altar. Then in the following verses, Christ expounds the worldwide significance of this sacrifice. "For God," he says, "so loved the world"...and he "sent not his Son...to condemn the world," but to save the world. How shocked Nicodemus was with this heavenly teaching of the Master, Jesus. He heard that God not only did love the Jews—his own people, as he always thought—but he loved the bad, the evil world of sinners, that he also sent his Son for them. And would the work of the Messiah have a worldwide significance? See, that was a new truth to Nicodemus. But it needed not, if he had understood the significance of the four horns of the corners of the Brazen Altar.

So with this, we will pause our studies on this Altar, and conclude it in our next session, with the last two thoughts. So may God bless us all with his Spirit's teaching, making us see new things in old truths. Thank you.