

Exodus 27:1-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-27/exodus-271-8/>

God gives instructions on how to build the high altar that would be used for burnt offerings. The account of its construction was recorded in [Exodus 38:1 – 7](#).

The LORD now gave instructions on fashioning the altar, the place for the burning of sacrifices (also called the “bronze altar” in many places including [Exodus 38:30](#), [39:30](#) and [Ezekiel 9:2](#)) and other items associated with it. The altar was to have the following characteristics:

It was to be made of *acacia wood*, like the ark and other tabernacle items.

It was to be *five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits*. Since a cubit is around 18 inches, the altar was probably 7.5 feet (around 2.25 meters) on each side, making it *square*. It was to be *three cubits* tall, making it about 4.5 feet (around 1.3 meters) tall.

They were to *make its horns on its four corners* (v. 2). This is the first of many references to the *horns* of the *altar*. An *altar* with *horns* was not unique to Israel in the Ancient Near East. Other peoples built their altars with *horns* to represent the power of their gods. Here, they represented the power of the one true God.

In addition, these *horns* were to *be of one piece with it*, meaning that the *horns* were not separate pieces that were appended to the altar but were part of an *altar* made as one solid piece.

Moreover, they were to *overlay it with bronze*. *Bronze* was a less precious metal than gold or silver, but sturdy and ornate.

After the horns, there were instructions on how to make the utensils associated with the altar.

The first utensils mentioned were *its pails*, which were to be used *for removing its ashes* created by the fuel burned to cook the sacrifices. Along with the *pails*, they were to make *its shovels and its basins and its forks and its firepans*. A *firepan* was apparently like a charcoal starter, to maintain or start

the fire for the altar. There is an episode in [Numbers 16](#) where it seems each Levite who worked on the altar had their own *firepan* that was used to hold coals, in that instance “two hundred and fifty firepans” ([Numbers 16:17](#)). Finally, *all its utensils* were to be constructed *of bronze*.

There was to be a *grating of network of bronze*. For the *network* (or *net*) that constituted the *grating* they needed to *make four bronze rings at its four corners*, presumably to make it easier to transport. This *grating* would create a super-sized outdoor grill upon which the sacrifices could be “barbecued.”

They were to *put it* (the *grating*) *beneath, under the ledge of the altar, so that the net will reach halfway up the altar*. This means that the *net* was to be installed on a ledge that was halfway up the altar, making it about 2 feet above the ground. The “barbecue pit” would have a recessed *grating*.

There were also to be *poles for the altar* to make the *altar* easier to transport. They were to be made *of acacia wood* and overlaid *with bronze*. In order to carry the *altar*, the *poles shall be inserted into the rings so that the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar when it is carried* .

The altar was to be *hollow with planks*. This would make it lighter to carry.

All of this was to be done *as it was shown to Moses in the mountain*.

The LORD made it very clear to Moses how to construct the altar and its utensils while he was on Mount Sinai. This command is repeated throughout, emphasizing how important it was to build to His exact specifications without any modifications or additions.

The *horns* on the *altar* appear later in the Old Testament. They were to be sprinkled with the blood of a sacrificed bull as a person’s sin offering ([Leviticus 4:2 – 34](#)). They were also a place where a person accused of a crime could go and seek asylum ([1 Kings 1:50](#), for example).

The Suzerain (Ruler) God asked His vassals (Israel) to make an *altar* so that they could offer animal sacrifices to Him. God’s primary intent was for the sacrifices to affect the hearts of the people and result in obedience to His covenant with them. God desired the people to walk in fellowship with Him through obeying His commands, and thereby keep His covenant. The sacrifice was a means to assure the people that they could restore fellowship with God (and one another) when they messed up.

That God primarily desired obedience from the heart is stated overtly in the episode of King Saul offering a sacrifice against God's commands in [1 Samuel 15:20-23](#). There the prophet Samuel states:

“Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD?”
([1 Samuel 15:22](#))

Obedying God's commands would lead to the great benefit of the people. If they live in self-governance, loving their neighbors and seeking mutual benefit, their society will thrive and be blessed. The sacrifice was an ongoing means of restoration of fellowship.

The book of Hebrews summarizes this intended purpose of the animal sacrifice to cover the weakness of humans, and their tendency to sin. The sacrifice is a means to “deal gently with the ignorant and misguided” by a leader who also understands his own weakness. Thus there is an ongoing restoration of fellowship.

“For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.”
([Hebrews 5:1-3](#))

The animal sacrifice also looked ahead to a better High Priest and a perfect sacrifice – both housed in the person of Jesus Christ. Animal sacrifice was a symbolic act that foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice offered by the blood of Jesus Christ ([Heb. 13:10](#), [Romans 3:24-26](#); [Heb. 9:6-14](#); [1 Pe. 1:18-21](#)).

Jesus offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice, once for all time as a payment for sin ([Hebrews 9:11-12](#)). Jesus' sacrifice covered the sins of the world, and nailed them to the cross with Him ([Hebrews 2:17](#); [Colossians 2:13-14](#)). God asks New Testament believers to live their lives as a living sacrifice, pleasing to Him ([Romans 12:1](#)).

The New Testament presents Jesus not only as our perfect sacrifice, offered once for all, but also as our perpetual and abiding high priest, who intervenes for us even when we sin. This passage from [Hebrews 7](#) shows the function Jesus performs, showing that the role of High Priest was also a foreshadowing of Jesus:

“For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself”

([Hebrews 7:26-27](#)).

Biblical Text:

¹“And you shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. ²You shall make its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. ³You shall make its pails for removing its ashes, and its shovels and its basins and its forks and its firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze. ⁴You shall make for it a grating of network of bronze, and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. ⁵You shall put it beneath, under the ledge of the altar, so that the net will reach halfway up the altar. ⁶You shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. ⁷Its poles shall be inserted into the rings, so that the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. ⁸You shall make it hollow with planks; as it was shown to you in the mountain, so they shall make *it*.