

Exodus 38:1-7

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The altar of burnt offering is built for the courtyard outside the tabernacle where worshippers would bring sacrifices to offer to the LORD. The specifications for building the altar of burnt offering and related utensils were given in [Exodus 27:1 – 8](#).

*The altar of burnt offering was the first thing that a worshipper would see when entering the courtyard. It was by the doorway of the tent of meeting ([Leviticus 1:3](#)). The *altar* stood in front of the entrance to the tent of meeting and God's presence, reminding the Israelites of a need for blood sacrifice to atone for sins. This *altar* was also the place where other types of sacrifices were conducted ([Leviticus 7:2](#)). *The altar of burnt offering* was constructed of *acacia wood* and was built to be *five cubits long, and five cubits wide, square*. This would make the altar 7.5 feet (around 2.3 meters) *square*. The *altar* was elevated, being *three cubits high*, which would make the *altar* about 4.5 feet (around 1.4 meters) tall.*

The *burnt offering* was an offering that could be offered voluntarily, although it was also sometimes required, often in connection with a "sin offering." In Hebrew the word translated "burnt offering" is "Oleh" which means "to ascend." The ancient Israelites visualized the gift or offering ascending by means of the fire and smoke to God and called it an ascension. It was given by the vassals (Israel) to maintain fellowship with the Suzerain (Ruler) God and make atonement on behalf of the person bringing the offering ([Leviticus 1:4](#)).

Bezalel, the chief craftsman, put *horns on the altar's four corners, its horns being of one piece with it, and he overlaid it with bronze*.

The *horns* symbolized strength and even a place of sanctuary ([1 Kings 2:28](#), for example).

Then Bezalel *made all the utensils of the altar, meaning the pails and the shovels and the basins, the flesh hooks and the firepans*. The *pails, shovels, and basins* were used to clean and maintain the altar. As one might imagine, there were quite a few sacrifices done on the *altar* during the day, and the residue had to be removed. The *flesh hooks* were three-pronged forks used to place the sacrifices on the altar and then remove remaining flesh for the

priests' portion, for them to eat ([1 Samuel 2:13](#)). The *firepans* (Heb. "makhtah," also translated "censers") were probably a type of tray used to carry fire to the altar of incense in the Holy Place as well as other applications ([Leviticus 16:12](#); Numbers 17:46). As with other items, *all its utensils were made of bronze*. Every item was to be specially made, set apart, or sanctified, for service. This likely symbolizes that each one of God's people is set apart to follow the law and serve God by loving their neighbor as themselves.

After the *utensils* were made, Bezalel *made for the altar a grating of bronze network beneath, under its ledge, reaching halfway up*. The *grating* was something of a metal net probably placed *halfway up* the altar (meaning about two feet off the ground) It was presumably used as a grate on which to cook the animal meat that was then given as food for the priests.

Verses 5 – 7 describe the items to be used to carry the altar, when the Israelites relocated their camp. First, Bezalel *cast four rings on the four ends of the bronze grating as holders for the poles*. Then *he made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with bronze*. Finally, *he inserted the poles into the rings on the sides of the altar, with which to carry it*. The poles would be *inserted into the rings* which would allow the Levites to carry the altar using the poles.

Moses lastly noted that Bezalel *made it hollow with planks*. To make the portable altar *hollow* would make the altar lighter in weight, and therefore easier to transport.

The exact location of the altar is not specified. [Leviticus 1:3](#) says each animal that is to be offered as a burnt offering is to be offered at "the doorway of the tent of meeting," meaning at the altar that is also there. So it is likely that the altar of burnt offering was somewhere between the entrance to the courtyard and the *doorway of the tent of meeting*, nearer to the *doorway*. The function of this altar was to provide a place where a sacrifice could be offered in order to receive atonement before the LORD. [Ex 40:6](#) expounds on this location, saying, "You shall set the altar of burnt offering in front of the doorway of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting." The bronze altar was so close to the doorway that the area was called both "the altar of burnt offering" as well as "the doorway to the tent of meeting."

In the New Testament, the Lamb (Christ our Lord) became a sacrifice for us so that those who believe would be accepted by God through Jesus ([John 1:29, 36, 3:14-16](#); [Hebrews 9:11-22](#); [Revelation 7:14](#)). Jesus' blood also

covers believers' sins on an ongoing basis, even unknown sins, that we might walk in fellowship with Him (1 John 1:7) as well as known sin that we confess, to restore fellowship (1 John 1:9). The continual nature of the various sacrifices likely picture the continual ministry of Jesus as our High Priest in heaven (Hebrews 9:11 – 10:18). Since the tabernacle represents a copy of the true tabernacle in heaven, it should not be surprising that the tabernacle patterns are repeated in the New Testament (Hebrews 9:23).

Biblical Text:

¹ Then he made the altar of burnt offering of acacia wood, five cubits long, and five cubits wide, square, and three cubits high. ² He made its horns on its four corners, its horns being of one piece with it, and he overlaid it with bronze. ³ He made all the utensils of the altar, the pails and the shovels and the basins, the flesh hooks and the firepans; he made all its utensils of bronze. ⁴ He made for the altar a grating of bronze network beneath, under its ledge, reaching halfway up. ⁵ He cast four rings on the four ends of the bronze grating as holders for the poles. ⁶ He made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with bronze. ⁷ He inserted the poles into the rings on the sides of the altar, with which to carry it. He made it hollow with planks.