Horns of the Alter - posted by denem7 (), on: 2005/7/30 10:58

can someone tell me what the horns of the alter are (as mentioned throughout the old testament)? what was their purpose? do they "represent" something else or are they symbolic for anything? thanks- dennis

Re: Horns of the Alter - posted by cchhhrrriisss (), on: 2005/7/30 12:45

Hello denem7...

I was just studying this topic yesterday. There is a lot that can be found on the internet or in topical Bibles and Bible dictionaries.

I found this in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia:
Quote:

(qare-noth ha-mizbeach):
1. The Brazen Altar:
These projections at the four corners of the altar of burnt offering were of one piece with the altar, and were made of acacia wood overlaid with brass (Ex 27:2, "bronze"). In Ezekiel's altar-specifications their position is described as being on a level with the altar hearth (Ezek 43:15). Fugitives seeking a sylum might cling to the horns of the altar, as did Adonijah (1 Ki 1:50), which is one proof among many that worshippers had at all times access to the neighborhood of the altar. On certain occasions, as at the consecration of Aaron and his sons (Ex 29:12), and a sin offering for one of the people of the land (Lev 4:30), the horns were touched with sacrificial blood.
2. The Golden Altar:
The altar of incense, standing in the outer chamber of the sanctuary, had also four horns, which were covered with gold (Ex 37:25). These were touched with blood in the case of a sin offering for a high priest, or for the whole congregation, if they had sinned unwittingly (Lev 4:7.18).

interestingly, i have heard alot of believers speak about "laying hold of the horns of the altar" when they pray. i suppose that they take this to mean a "praying until you pray" type of spiritual cliche. but it is interesting that Joab was killed even after he laid holds of those horns and refused to leave (2 Kings 2:28-34).

this is similar to the passages that describe that sacrifice and worship often go unheard (or unanswered) by the Lord. F or instance, the Israelites made alot of noise with shouts of victory -- but were still defeated at the hands of the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:5-11). there are other accounts in the Word of God of men who prayed, sacrificed or worshipped without their hearts being pure. It doesn't matter how diligently you pray, but if your heart is not pure, humble, or broken over sin, then your prayer is hollow. This is similar to Samuel's response to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:13-23
Quote:

"And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleeding of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

Here, Saul began an attempt to justify his actions (and rebellion) to God by boasting of his "good idea."
Quote:

"And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?"

God was reminding Saul how far he had fallen, and showing the pride that was in his own heart.
Quote:

"And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD? But didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD? And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of the Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal."

Again, Saul is attempting to justify himself through the authority that God had given him. Unfortunately, Saul was forgetting that such authority is worthless if you stray from the precepts and commands that God gives.
Quote:

"And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king."

Samuel is explaining how empty and meaningless our attempts at sacrifice can sometimes be. God desires obedience.
- with a humble heart.

This is further explained in Psalms 24:

Quote:

-----------Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does no t lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior.
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It is also reminiscent of David's repentive proclamation after he had committed adultery with Bathsheeba. It is sort of a definition of what type of prayer God hears.

Quote:

-----------Psalm 51:16-17
For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrit e heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.
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Anyway, I know the second part of this had less to do with the "horns of the altar" as it does the modern cliche concernin g the "horns of the altar." For more information, you might try performing an online search (through a search engine like Google). I found quite a bit of information. However, as with everything, you will have to discern between the real and t he chaff. I hope this helps!

:-)

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/7/30 14:41

Quote:

-----------Interestingly, I have heard alot of believers speak about "laying hold of the horns of the altar" when they pray. I suppose that they ta ke this to mean a "praying until you pray" type of spiritual cliche. But it is interesting that Joab was killed even after he laid holds of those horns and ref used to leave (2 Kings 2:28-34).
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I think 'believers' use of this phrase probably comes from two separate ideas; the 'judgements' that were given at Sinai a nd then expanded later, and tying down a sacrifice. Â“He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee. But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.Â” (Ex. 21:12-14, KJVS) God gave cities of refuge where a 'manslayer' could find refuge. However if the man murde r was premeditated the guilty man could be taken from the altar by force and punished. The reference given ought to ha ve been 1 Kings 2:28-34, I think.

The 'horns of the altar' probably comes from another scripture: Â'God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.Â” (Psa. 118:27, KJVS) The 'horns' were corner projections which c ould be as anchor points when tying on several sacrifices at the same time. It has come to signify 'determination' in that the believer has not only made his sacrifice but tied it down so that it doesn't slip off the altar when the fire burns.

So both thoughts of the horns of the altar here merge into the idea of desperation; I think this is what 'believers' have in mind when they use the phrase. I think from the tone of voice it usually means a deliberate and irreversible sacrifice.