

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Ezekiel 43:13-21

English Standard Version

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, November 9, 2014

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, November 9, 2014**, is from **Ezekiel 43:13-21**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is usually posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Ezekiel 43:13-21

(Ezekiel 43:13) “These are the measurements of the altar by cubits (the cubit being a cubit and a handbreadth): its base shall be one cubit high and one cubit broad, with a rim of one span around its edge. And this shall be the height of the altar:

We have no record in the Bible that those who returned from exile in Babylon to Jerusalem did what the LORD told them to do through Ezekiel in building the temple and the altar he described. Compare their response to Moses blessing the Israelites for doing all that the LORD commanded them (see Exodus 39:43). Compare also Exodus 40:16, Moses built the tabernacle and the first altar as the LORD commanded. In Exodus 40, Moses did all things “as the LORD commanded.”

(Ezekiel 43:14) from the base on the ground to the lower ledge, two cubits, with a breadth of one cubit; and from the smaller ledge to the larger ledge, four cubits, with a breadth of one cubit;

The LORD entered the tabernacle after Moses did all that the LORD commanded in dedicating to the LORD all that they had made and dedicating the priests who would serve Him. The altar for the new temple would have been large and tall with platforms on each level for the priests to stand upon to lift the sacrifices up to the top of the altar.

(Ezekiel 43:15) and the altar hearth, four cubits; and from the altar hearth projecting upward, four horns.

The altars for the tabernacle, for Solomon’s Temple, and for the second temple were to have horns on each corner which would serve a practical purpose when putting the

sacrifice on the altar. A “horn” could also symbolize “power;” we might think of the shape of the horns on a mighty bull and its power. The Bible says that some of those who offended the king of Israel ran to the horns of the altar and grasped them as a place of refuge or protection; for example, Adonijah hoped to save himself from King Solomon by taking hold of the horns of the altar (1 Kings 1:50), and Joab also hoped to save himself from King Solomon by grasping the horns of the altar (1 Kings 2:28). Perhaps Adonijah and Joab thought God would protect them if they grasped the horns of the altar, or no one would dare kill them if they grasped the horns of the altar out of respect for the sacredness of the altar.

(Ezekiel 43:16) The altar hearth shall be square, twelve cubits long by twelve broad.

Just as God gave Moses detailed instructions for the tabernacle, altar, priests’ vestments, and sacrifices, so God gave detailed instructions to the Jews in Babylon that God expected them to obey when they returned to Jerusalem and built a new temple. If they did what the Lord commanded them, the LORD would enter His temple according to Ezekiel’s vision (Ezekiel 44:4-6).

(Ezekiel 43:17) The ledge also shall be square, fourteen cubits long by fourteen broad, with a rim around it half a cubit broad, and its base one cubit all around. The steps of the altar shall face east.”

Steps facing east, the direction from which the LORD would enter the temple, would enable the priests to walk up to each ledge to lift the sacrifice up to the top of the altar. Some scholars believe the altar was about 20 feet tall depending on the length of a cubit (the length of a cubit was a measurement between the elbow and the tips of the fingers).

(Ezekiel 43:18) And he said to me, “Son of man, thus says the Lord GOD: These are the ordinances for the altar: On the day when it is erected for offering burnt offerings upon it and for throwing blood against it,

An ordinance is a law, rule, or regulation; in this case, a law to be followed by the house of Israel. The altar had to be consecrated and set apart for a holy use before sacrifices could be offered upon it, and the rite of consecration had to be according to the ordinances of God. The ordinances for the altar according to Ezekiel were consistent with the ordinances that God gave to Moses when he built the tabernacle and the altar in the wilderness. God intended for these ordinances and practices to be performed and point to the coming of the Messiah and the meaning of His sacrificial death in behalf of sinners.

(Ezekiel 43:19) you shall give to the Levitical priests of the family of Zadok, who draw near to

me to minister to me, declares the Lord GOD, a bull from the herd for a sin offering.

Only the sons of Zadok were allowed to draw near to God to minister to Him because out of all of the Levites only the family of Zadok had remained true to the Lord during decades of idolatry (see Ezekiel 44:10-16). God declared that the other Levites had to bear their punishment. To begin to worship and serve the LORD rightly and to draw near to Him, sin must first be dealt with God's way and no priest or Levite was without sin. Before other offerings could be made on the altar a sin offering must first be made. Our sins are the barrier between us and God, and the sin offering commanded by God opens the way for us to come to Him. When Jesus the Messiah died for our sins, He opened the way for us to give our lives to God and His holy service when we repent of our sins and trust in Him for salvation.

(Ezekiel 43:20) And you shall take some of its blood and put it on the four horns of the altar and on the four corners of the ledge and upon the rim all around. Thus you shall purify the altar and make atonement for it.

The altar would have been erected with unclean hands; that is, the hands of sinful builders. Though the altar might have been built according to God's specifications, it needed to be ritually cleansed before it could be used for

holy sacrifices to the LORD, and it must be cleansed according to God's instructions. Blood from the sin offering would ritually cleanse the altar and set it apart for holy use.

(Ezekiel 43:21) You shall also take the bull of the sin offering, and it shall be burned in the appointed place belonging to the temple, outside the sacred area.”

After the blood of the sin offering taken from the bull was placed on the altar for cleansing, the bull was not burned or sacrificed on the altar. The sin offering was to be burnt outside of the sacred area, but in a place belonging to the temple. Various sin offerings and sacrifices were to be offered for seven days to consecrate the altar and only on the eighth day did they begin other sacrifices on the altar according to other ordinances of God. Today, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all of our sins and the blood sacrifices of animals are not to be offered to God.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why do you think God gave such detailed directions for building the new temple and altar and for performing proper sacrifices?
2. Think of one practical reason why the steps to the altar were to face east?

3. How did what the Levites did before their exile in Babylon have an effect on their children?
4. Why did God want a bull for a sin offering?
5. Where was the bull of the sin offering burnt? Why do you think this place was chosen?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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