

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Ezekiel 43:13-21

King James Version

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, November 9, 2014

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

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.

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Ezekiel 43:13-21

(Ezekiel 43:13) And these *are* the measures of the altar after the cubits: The cubit *is* a cubit and an hand breadth; even the bottom *shall be* a cubit, and the breadth a cubit, and the border thereof by the edge thereof round about *shall be* a span: and this *shall be* the higher place 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) And from the bottom *upon* the ground *even* to the lower settle *shall be* two cubits, and the breadth one cubit; and from the lesser settle *even* to the greater settle *shall be* four cubits, and the breadth *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) So the altar *shall be* four cubits; and from the altar and upward *shall be* 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) And the altar *shall be* twelve cubits long, twelve broad, square in the four squares thereof.

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) And the settle *shall be* fourteen cubits long and fourteen broad in the four squares thereof; and the border about it *shall be* half a cubit; and the bottom thereof *shall be* a cubit about; and his stairs shall look toward the 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 unto me, Son of man, thus saith the Lord GOD; These *are* the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon.

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) And thou shalt give to the priests the Levites that be of the seed of Zadok, which approach unto me, to minister unto me, saith the Lord GOD, a young bullock 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 thou shalt take of the blood thereof, and put *it* on the four horns of it, and on the four corners of the settle, and upon the border round about: thus shalt thou cleanse and purge 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) Thou shalt take the bullock also of the sin offering, and he shall burn it in the appointed place of the house, without the sanctuary.

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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