

Ezekiel 43:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

So the altar shall be four cubits; and from the altar and upward shall be four horns.

Analysis

So the altar shall be four cubits. The Hebrew *hā'ārî'ēl* (הָאֲרִיֶּעֶל, "the altar") uses a term meaning "lion of God" or "hearth of God." This designation appears in Isaiah 29:1-2, 7 as a cryptic name for Jerusalem. Here it refers to the altar hearth, the top surface where sacrifices burned—the point of greatest heat and holiest contact between the offering and God. Standing four cubits (approximately 6.8 feet) above the previous ledge, the total height from ground level would be approximately 10 cubits (17 feet).

"And from the altar and upward shall be four horns." The *qəranôt* (קַרְנוֹת, "horns") projecting from the altar's four corners served multiple purposes: they symbolized power and strength (the horn being a biblical image of might—Psalm 75:4-5, 10), provided places to bind the sacrifice (Psalm 118:27), and served as refuge for those seeking asylum (1 Kings 1:50, 2:28). Blood was applied to the horns during sin offerings (Leviticus 4:7, 25, 30), making them the focal point of atonement.

The horns represent Christ's sacrifice in vivid symbolism. As the bound sacrifice (Genesis 22:9), He was tied to the altar of the cross. As the blood applied to the horns, His blood accomplished eternal atonement (Hebrews 9:12). As the altar of refuge, He is our only safety from judgment (Romans 3:25, "propitiation through faith in his blood"). The four horns facing four directions proclaim that His sacrifice avails for "all nations" (Matthew 28:19)—north, south, east, and west—"whosoever will" may come.

Historical Context

Horned altars are confirmed by archaeology throughout Israel/Palestine, with limestone examples discovered at Beer-sheba, Megiddo, and elsewhere. The practice of grasping the altar horns for sanctuary (Exodus 21:14, 1 Kings 1:50-53, 2:28-34) demonstrated the altar's role as God's throne of mercy. However, refuge was denied to willful murderers (Exodus 21:14), and apostates who defiled the horns were subject to judgment (Amos 3:14). The altar as both refuge and judgment seat perfectly typifies Christ, who is either Savior or Judge depending on one's response to His sacrifice.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How do the altar horns as places of refuge illustrate Christ as the only safe haven from God's wrath against sin?
2. What does grasping the horns (seeking refuge) teach about active faith in Christ's atonement rather than passive acknowledgment?

Interlinear Text

וּמִהָאֲרָא יֵל	אַרְבָּע:	אַמּוֹת	וּמִהָאֲרָא יֵל	וּלְמַ עֲלֶה	הַקֶּרֶן אוֹת
So the altar	shall be four	cubits	So the altar	and upward	horns
H741	H702	H520	H741	H4605	H7161

אַרְבָּע:

shall be four

H702

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 27:2 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt overlay it with brass.

Psalms 118:27 (Sacrifice): God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.

Leviticus 9:9 (Sacrifice): And the sons of Aaron brought the blood unto him: and he dipped his finger in the blood, and put it upon the horns of the altar, and poured out the blood at the bottom of the altar:

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